



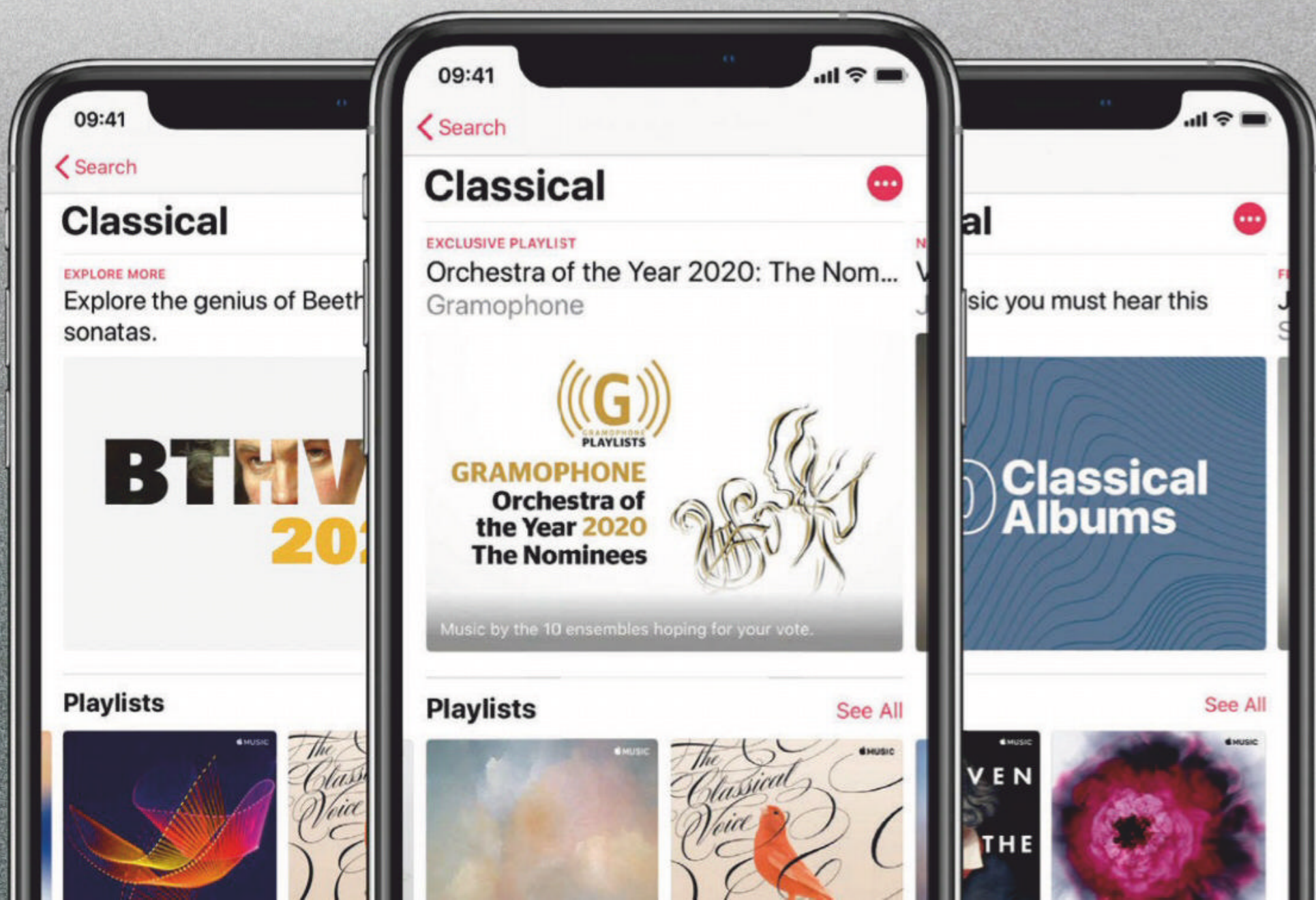
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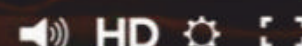
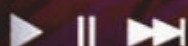
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M Abel

'The Cave of Wondrous Voice'

Clarinet Trio^a. The Elastic Hours^b. Intuition's

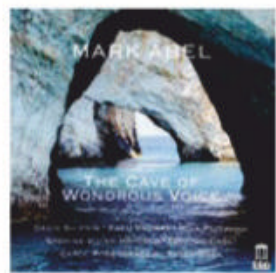
Dance^c. Four Poems of Maria Tsvetaeva^d

^dHila Plitmann *sop* ^dSarah Beck *cor ang* ^{ac}David

Shifrin *cl* ^bSabrina-Vivian Höpcker *vn* ^aFred Sherry

vc ^bDominic Cheli, ^{acd}Carol Rosenberger *pf*

Delos © DE3570 (68' • DDD • T)



The title of this new disc of chamber music by Mark Abel comes from a song-

cycle set to texts by the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941). As he has demonstrated on previous recordings of songs and operas, the American composer treats words with shapely care, establishing vibrant and urgent contexts for the interaction of voice and instruments.

Tsvetaeva's verses make their debut in English in the Abel settings, authoritatively performed here by the soprano Hila Plitmann. The songs take full advantage of Plitmann's 'wondrous voice', which gleams in all registers, especially when she picks out notes in the stratosphere. Her attention to meaning suffuses every phrase and she is quick to add dramatic intensity when required, as in the emphatic 'no' that ends 'O sorrow floods my eyes!'. Sarah Beck's warm English horn and Carol Rosenberger's glistening pianism are ideal partners.

Rosenberger is also a dynamic colleague in two pieces with the clarinetist David Shifrin. *Intuition's Dance* takes the instruments through a series of conversations ranging from playful to conflicting, with the dance element portrayed in buoyant episodes. The musicians are joined by the cellist Fred Sherry in the Clarinet Trio, three movements of poetic, engaging and philosophical material that these superb players afford colourful and lyrical delineation.

Writing about *The Elastic Hours*, Abel states that the two movements 'follow a near-seismographic path that strongly suggests the subconscious mind's journey

through the course of a day'. Whatever the suggestions, the music is compelling in narrative depth and energy, and the violinist Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker and pianist Dominic Cheli animate the discussions with a bounty of expressive allure. **Donald Rosenberg**

Danielpour

The Passion of Yeshua

Hila Plitmann *sop* J'Nai Bridges *mez* Timothy

Fallon *ten* James K Bass, Kenneth Overton,

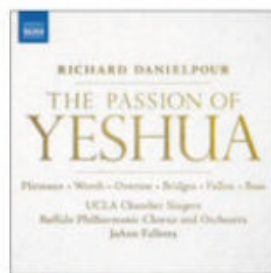
Matthew Worth *bars* UCLA Chamber Singers;

Buffalo Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra /

JoAnn Falletta

Naxos American Classics © ② 8 559885/6

(103' • DDD • T/t)



Richard Danielpour is a composer of prolific accomplishment. He has contributed

to the realms of concert and operatic music with skilful assurance, employing essentially tonal means to bring immediacy to whatever narrative he builds. His canvas is enormous in *The Passion of Yeshua*, an oratorio about the last day in the life of Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) with texts in Hebrew and English compiled by the composer from sacred sources. This recording by the work's original performers is a vibrant realisation that reveals both the power and limitations of Danielpour's creation.

The piece, which runs an hour and 43 minutes, is cast in 14 sections that, like predecessors in the genre, tell the story and comment upon it. Danielpour makes bold use of choral forces to evoke events leading to the death of Yeshua and to convey the spirituality of key moments. It is in these passages of massed singing and biting declamation that the oratorio achieves urgency and eloquence. The fervour of the choral writing and vibrant colours Danielpour paints in the orchestra reflect a composer in full command of his art.

But sections between these dynamic episodes are tempered by pacing that is

generally unvaried, leisurely and short of dramatic tension. Many of the Narrator's lines are so sedate that the impact of the text is diminished. Danielpour's music is expertly constructed and often affecting, even if it tends to sound familiar, with nods to Bernstein's rhythmic vitality, Walton's jauntiness and Brahms's mournful warmth. Among the score's finest pages are the solos and duets of the three female characters – Yeshua's mother and sister and Mary Magdalene – sung with lustrous expressivity by the soprano Hila Plitmann and mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges. The men also are excellent, from Kenneth Overton's noble Yeshua and Matthew Worth's articulate Narrator to Timothy Fallon's vehement Pilate and Kefa and James K Bass's sonorous Kayafa.

JoAnn Falletta is a forceful champion of the score, which she shapes with sensitive and potent authority. The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus and UCLA Chamber Singers are splendid collaborators. **Donald Rosenberg**

Jerusalem

Mass 'de los Niños'^a. ¡Ah! de la dulce métrica armonía^b. Incipit lamentatio Jeremiae Prophetar^c. Pedro Amado^b. Symphony with Hunting Horns

^{ab}Nythia Martínez, ^bEleanor Ranney-Mendoza,

^aBruno Rivera *sops* ^aMallory Harding, ^cAlexa Græ

contrs ^aBilly Sefton *ten* Chicago Arts ^aChorale and

Orchestra / Javier José Mendoza

Navona © NV6274 (54' • DDD • T/t)



Despite the Spanish form of his name, Ignacio de Jerusalem (1707-69) was Italian,

born Ignazio Gerusalemme in Lecce. Like his older contemporary, Domenico Scarlatti, Jerusalem found greater fame in Spain (in Cadiz), though unlike Scarlatti, in 1742 (10 years after arriving in Spain), Jerusalem was enticed to Mexico City, where he remained for the rest of his life, composing profusely and becoming Chapel Master of the Cathedral in 1750.

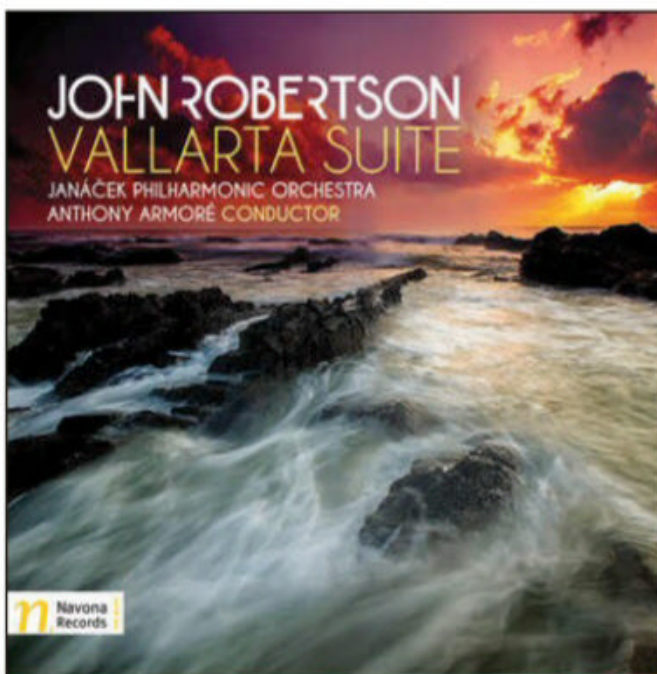


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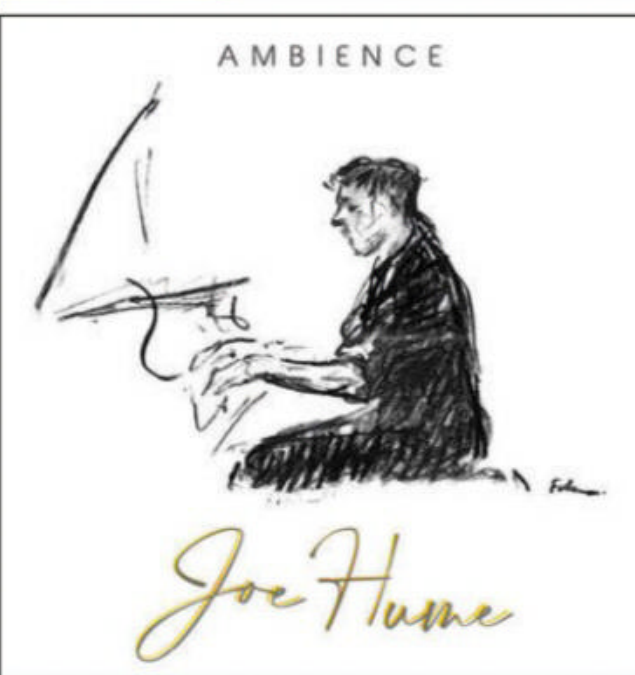


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Poetic and engaging: David Shifrin (clarinet), Carol Rosenberger (piano) and Fred Sherry (cello) playing Mark Abel's Clarinet Trio – see review on page I

The five works here date mostly from the final decade of Jerusalem's life. The *Missa de los Niños* (not the same work as the G major Mass recorded 25 years ago by Schola Cantorum Mexico on Urtext Digital Classics) has pride of place but strikes me as rather uneven. After a moving yet prelude-like *Kyrie*, the meat of the work lies in a rather sectional setting of the *Gloria* followed by a more unified *Credo*, yet the final pair of movements – *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* – are brief to the point of perfunctory. The longest track, the cantata *Incipit lamentatio Jeremiae Prophetiae* is another matter, music of a consistently higher quality, very nicely sung here by Alexa Græ.

Jerusalem's use of the Italian *galant* style made his music popular in Mexico (manuscripts spread from California to Guatemala) and the pair of charming duets and the Symphony 'with hunting horns' show this well. The Symphony – again, not the same work as the Symphony in G recorded by the same artists (Navona, 2013) – may seem a touch inconsequential and is at the overture end of the 18th-century form. The performances throughout by the Chicago Arts Orchestra and Chorale (the soloists all drawn from the latter's ranks) under Javier José Mendoza are nicely if unspectacularly rendered, a

few minor intonational slips aside. Navona's sound is very acceptable.

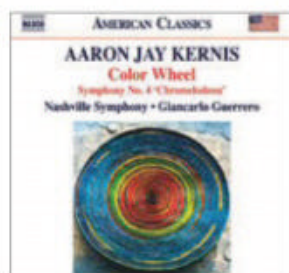
Guy Rickards

Kernis

Symphony No 4, 'Chromelodeon', Color Wheel
Nashville Symphony Orchestra /

Giancarlo Guerrero

Naxos American Classics © 8 559838 (52' • DDD)



Giancarlo Guerrero and the Nashville Symphony heroically meet the challenges

of two large orchestral works by Aaron Jay Kernis that speak in blocks of sound and episodes, and create narratives from shafts and vectors of movement and light. The brilliantly recorded results show how the composer's language has saddened and deepened in response to the changing times.

Kernis composed *Color Wheel* for the gala opening of the Philadelphia Orchestra's Kimmel Center in 2001 and to celebrate the orchestra's centennial. An awesome timpani roll, enough itself to sell a pair of loudspeakers, introduces passages of frozen time like *Nevsky's* ice lake leading to Oz-like poppy-field fantasies, delirious woodwinds and brass attitudes,

and suddenly you realise you're in the middle of what the composer calls a 'miniature' concerto for orchestra, just the kind of exhilarating showpiece that had been ordered.

Kernis's Fourth Symphony, *Chromelodeon* (which he defines as 'chromatic, colourful, melodic music performed by an orchestra'), was written 17 years later and you can feel the times in the music by the influences (Nhat Hanh, John Cage and Handel) and the themes. The first movement begins with instruments that glow in the dark, the winds making like an organ, a sinuous cello assaulted by shrieks. The second movement reflects on the words of 'Lascia ch'io pianga' in *Rinaldo*, 'Let me weep over my cruel fate, and that I long for freedom'.

The composer's immaculately written booklet notes provide fascinating details about the inner workings of the music while Guerrero and his virtuoso orchestra supply the horsepower and the passion.

Laurence Vittes

'Live from New York'

Brittelle Future Shock^a Coltrane Alabama^a
Dellaira Star Globe^b Matorri Naqsh-e Jahan^c
Tehran When Lonely^c **Mellits Groove Machine**
Ridenour NuPac Kanon & Jig Snowden
Traveler 65 **Vrebalov My Desert, My Rose**

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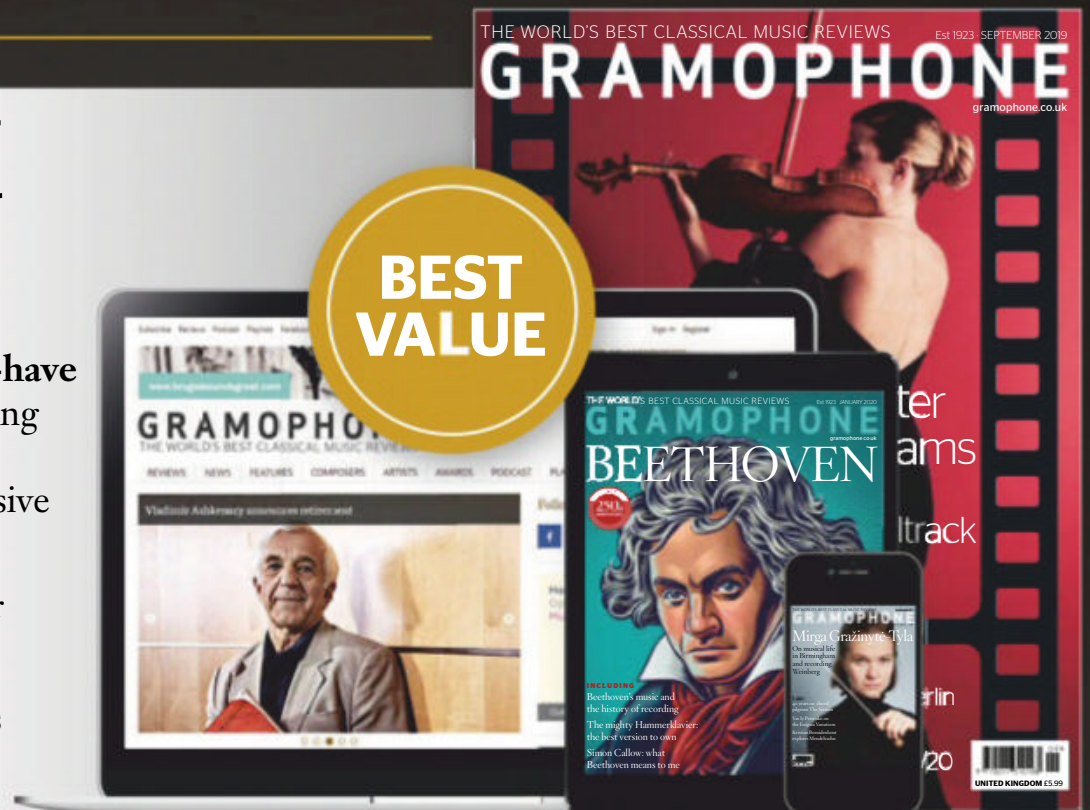
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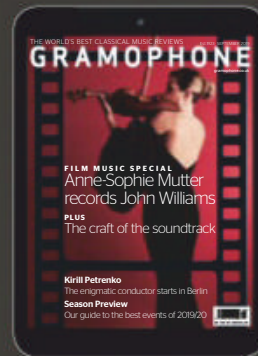
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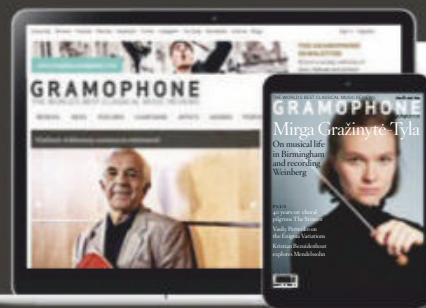
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^bBlythe Gaissert *mez* ^cEhsan Matoori *santoor*

^aShane Shanahan *perc* Sybarite5

Bright Shiny Things © BSTC0131 (50' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Cell Theatre, New York



For those unfamiliar with Sybarite5, they are a cutting-edge string quintet

comprising the traditional quartet line-up plus double bass. Based in New York, their brash and vibrant style is a reflection of their home city and, in particular, the Cell Theatre, where these live recordings of works written for them were made. The end result is a fusion of classical, jazz and world music, not unlike the Kosmos Ensemble in England, if less Balkan-folk-focused.

Sybarite5 are at their best in fast-paced, toccata-like music, best exemplified by Marc Mellits's *Groove Machine*, a recasting of the finale of his Second String Quartet (2006), which more than lives up to its name, and William Brittelle's *Future Shock* (2017). Brittelle's catalogue boasts three numbered similarly titled works, scored respectively for viola, cello and string quartet, all with electronics. The present unnumbered item is purely acoustic, given here in an arrangement with added percussion, played by Shane Shanahan, who also plays in the group's own reworking of John Coltrane's haunting *Alabama* (1963). Evocative as Sybarite5 are, their *Alabama* lacks the sheer intensity and outrage of Coltrane's own.

Trumpeter-arranger Brandon Ridenour's *NuPac Kanon & Jig* is a

virtuoso, fun take on Pachelbel that leaves 17th-century mannerisms far behind. Steven Snowden's *Traveler 65* (2016) compellingly describes the trajectory of the chimpanzee-astronaut launched into space in January 1961 but recovered alive, if psychologically damaged. The two pieces for santoor (the Iranian dulcimer) and quintet by Ehsan Matoori (*b*1979) – with the composer performing – and Aleksandra Vrebalov's *My Desert, My Rose* are delightful, providing welcome changes of pace and texture, as does Michael Dellaira's *Star Globe*, radiantly sung by Blythe Gaissert. The sound is a little cramped, reflecting the close acoustic of the Cell Theatre, but vivid. No notes, or text for *Star Globe*, are provided.

Guy Rickards

The Music Center at Strathmore, Maryland

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 2005

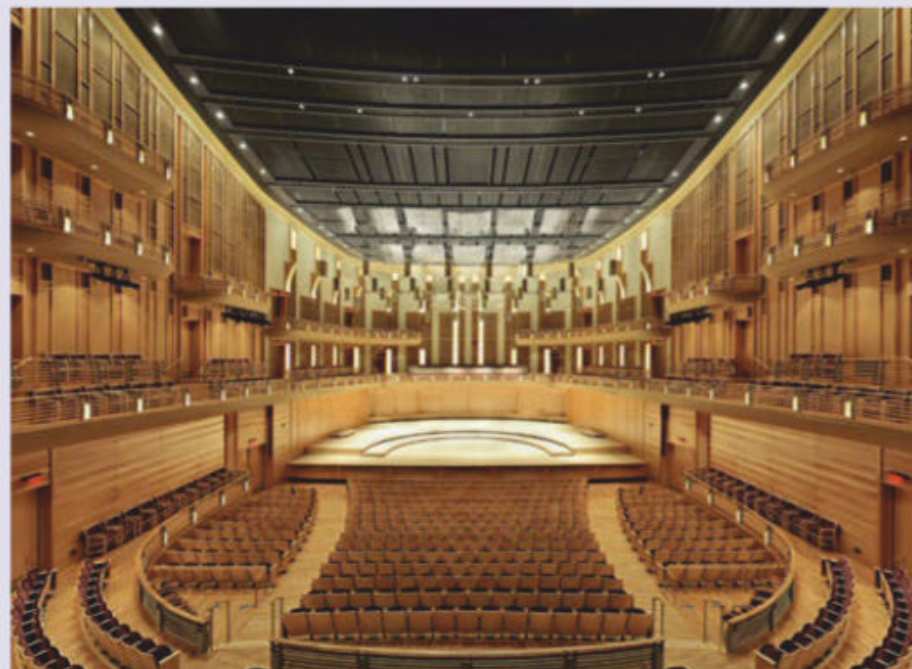
Architect William Rawn Associates; Grimm and Parker

Capacity 1976

Forty minutes south-south-west from Baltimore and half an hour north-west of Washington is the Music Center at Strathmore in North Bethesda, Maryland. It is located in affluent Montgomery County, once the site of sprawling tobacco plantations but today home to four of the National Institutes of Health, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the headquarters of corporations such as Lockheed Martin and Marriott.

Strathmore's modern identity began in the late 19th century, when Captain James Frederick Oyster acquired the land and built a nine-bedroom colonial revival summer house which still stands today. In 1979 the mansion and grounds were acquired by the county and the Strathmore Hall Foundation began development as an arts centre. After extensive restoration, Strathmore opened to the public in 1983. Through the combined efforts of state and county government, along with corporate and private philanthropy, ground was broken for the Music Center at Strathmore in April 2001. Designed by architects William Rawn Associates of Boston, Kirkegaard Associates, acousticians of Chicago, and Theatre Projects Consultants of Connecticut, with associate architects Grimm and Parker in Maryland, the Music Center at Strathmore opened in February 2005. Given the capital region's relative dearth of spaces appropriate for music, Strathmore quickly assumed a vital role on the cultural landscape, a role enhanced by its relative accessibility to both private and public transportation.

The heart of the Music Center is an inviting 1976-seat hall in the classic shoebox form of so many internationally renowned concert spaces. A mechanised canopy above the stage supports 43 adjustable acoustic panels, each individually controlled, as well as



the light grid. In terms of acoustics, that science which often seems more of an art, Strathmore must be considered an unqualified success. It is an equally grateful venue for large orchestras, small ensembles and solo recitalists.

Programming at Strathmore is robust and varied. The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the first orchestra in the US established by municipal appropriation in 1916, was a founding partner of Strathmore. Every season, most concerts of the BSO's regular series at Baltimore's Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, the orchestra's home base, are also given at Strathmore. Among other resident partners are the Washington Performing Arts Society (established in 1947), the region's most active and prestigious presenter; the National Philharmonic, formed in 2003 with the merger of the National Chamber Orchestra and Masterworks Chorus; the Levine School of Music, the region's foremost community music school; and CityDance, a conservatory for young dancers and choreographers, as well as a presenter.

Patrick Rucker

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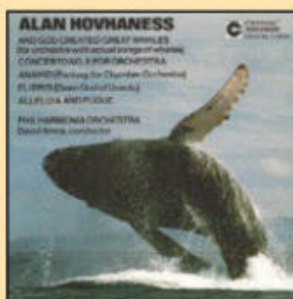
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A LETTER FROM *Chicago*

Howard Reich reflects on the present uncertainties for organisations large and small and their audiences



And then there was silence. The shuttering of Chicago's long-celebrated musical institutions due to the coronavirus lockdown has shattered one precedent after another. For the first time since 1935, the Ravinia Festival – summer home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra – cancelled its entire season. For the first time in its history, the Grant Park Music Festival – which emerged in 1935 and draws thousands to downtown Chicago every week for free summertime symphonic concerts – also cancelled its entire season. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, stilled since March 12 by governmental shutdown orders, will not give another concert until next season's scheduled opening in September at the soonest. And Lyric Opera of Chicago, which was to have made international news with its new production of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, lost that and the rest of the year as well.

Most of these organisations have not released their projected financial losses as this goes to press. But Anthony Freud,

Lyric Opera's general director, president and CEO, estimated the direct cost of cancelling the *Ring* and postponing other productions would be about \$15 million. That's a significant figure for an organisation with an endowment valued at \$180 million 'before the current market volatility', as Freud put it.

Then, too, the Chicago area's many small- and medium-sized classical instrumental, vocal and operatic ensembles – which stretch far beyond city limits into the northern, western and southern suburbs – also have gone silent until further notice. Many of these organisations, some of which subsist on a pittance, may not have the financial wherewithal to return.

As in other cities around America and the world, the musicians have turned to the internet for the pleasure of making music and to maintain some contact with audiences. Their efforts have been heroic and occasionally musically effective but, of course, a far cry from the real thing. One of the best was a bittersweet virtual concert on March 29, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, the Chicago Symphony's training orchestra. The event, presented on Facebook and YouTube, featured Civic principal conductor Ken-David Masur (the conductor Kurt Masur's son) introducing and leading a 40-minute pre-recorded presentation.

'The musicians are playing Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, which is very significant to us,' Masur told his cyber-viewers.

'It was going to be performed today in Orchestra Hall because 100 years ago, to this day, Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony was on the programme for the inaugural concert of Civic.'

The 62 young musicians appeared in those little rectangular boxes that have become ubiquitous online, playing excerpts from Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. Then they moved on to a series of world premieres commissioned for the occasion just a few days earlier. The idea was not just to salute the past but also to look 'forward into the future and the next 100 years', as Masur said.


Masur also addressed the perils of our time and the optimism that the Civic's very existence embodied. 'The crisis caused by this virus is heartbreaking,' he said. 'But I know that we will get through this. In 1918, the worldwide pandemic caused by the influenza virus killed millions of people, and only one year later,

the Civic Orchestra was founded. There was a yearning for music to bring people back together again, and I know that we are able to do this now as well.'

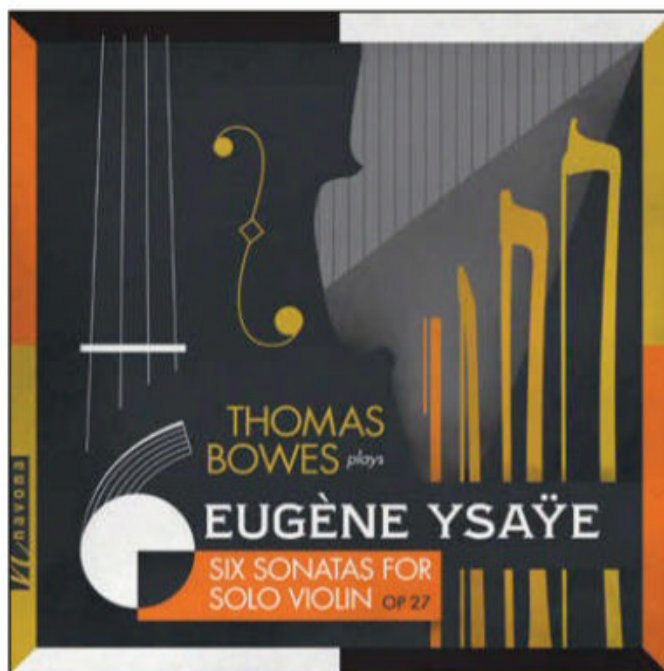
Whether that sentiment proves more hopeful than realistic remains to be seen and heard. Governments in Chicago and Illinois have issued some of the United States' most stringent and long-lasting lockdown regulations. This leads concert-goers to wonder when large venues such as Orchestra Hall in Symphony Center (seating more than 2500) and Lyric Opera House (more than 3500) can welcome large crowds again.

The pandemic represents a second blow to the Chicago Symphony, which last year lost seven weeks of performances when musicians went on strike over salary and pension benefits. The bitter battle triggered harsh words from both sides, and the rest of last season seemed in danger until then-Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel brokered an 11th-hour settlement.

This year's work stoppage will stretch for six months, at least, and no one knows how quickly a great orchestra can recover, musically, technically and financially. Still, music in Chicago benefits from the city's deep pools of corporate and philanthropic wealth. The CSO created a 'Music Ahead' challenge grant in the wake of the coronavirus, and it raised more than \$3 million in just a few weeks.

A city that rose from the ashes of the great Chicago Fire of 1871 has proved more than once that it cannot be stopped, so Chicagoans expect that the music inevitably will come roaring back. The question is when. And how. 

No one knows how quickly a great orchestra such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra can recover, musically, technically and financially



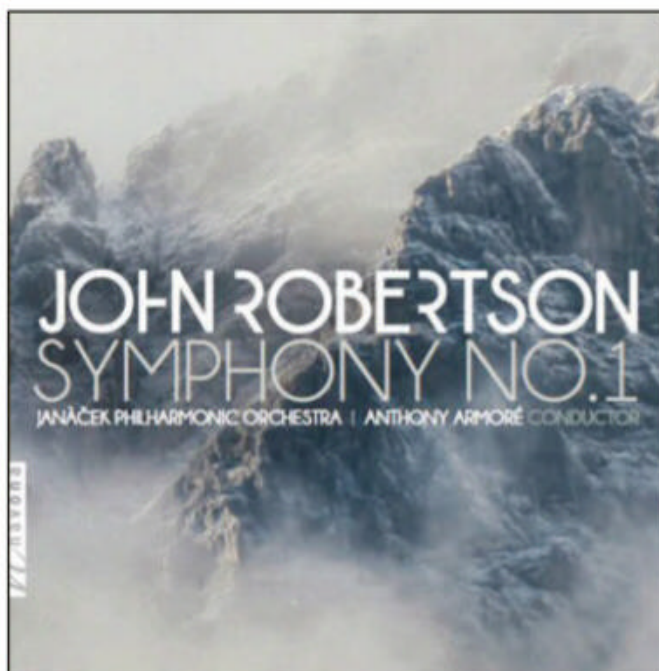
EUGÈNE YSAÏE THOMAS BOWES

Known for his complete recording of all Bach's sonatas and partitas, European virtuoso Thomas Bowes has now embarked on another quest for totality. This time, it is the six sonatas by YsaÏe, presented on Bowes' new album, **EUGÈNE YSAÏE: SIX SONATAS FOR SOLO VIOLIN**.

NAVONA RECORDS (NV6281)

www.thomasbowes.com

www.navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6281



SYMPHONY NO. 1 JOHN ROBERTSON

Deeply committed to a beautiful aesthetic, composer John Robertson's album **SYMPHONY NO. 1** once more delivers a neoclassical triumph with tremendous potential for repeated listening. This release flaunts an unapologetically exuberant elegance ever-present in the composer's oeuvre.

NAVONA RECORDS (NV6167)

www.navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6167



AMBIENCE JOE HUME

AMBIENCE is Big Round Records' latest release from composer Joe Hume. After a decade of working exclusively as a professional pianist, Hume has returned to composing in a big way with this compelling 11-track album of airy, original solo piano pieces.

BIG ROUND RECORDS (BR8961)

www.joehumemusic.com

www.bigroundrecords.com/catalog/br8961



SPIRIT OF HUMANITY GANESH B. KUMAR

A historical feast awaits listeners on Ganesh Kumar's **SPIRIT OF HUMANITY**. Half intended as an homage to Beethoven, half a musical portrayal of a little-known refugee crisis in World War II, it aims to be an epically emotional orchestral experience.

NAVONA RECORDS (NV6292)

www.navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6292



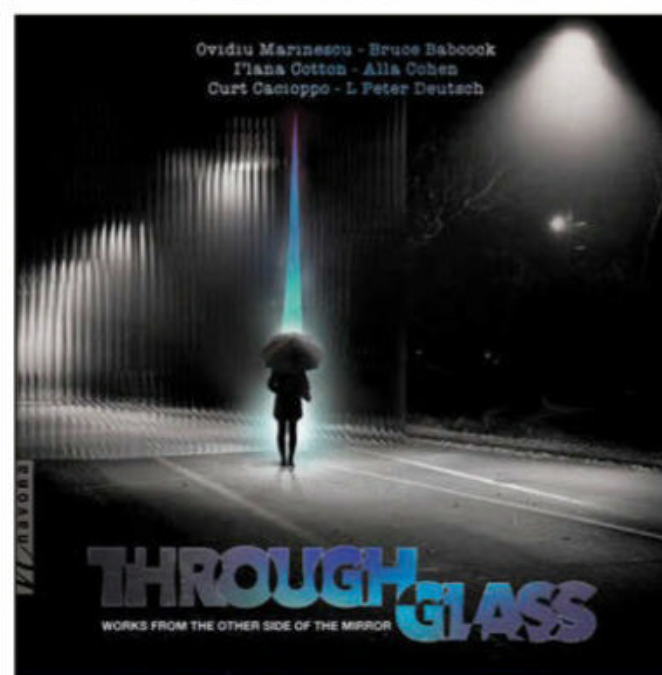
VERDI'S GUITAR ALAN RINEHART

VERDI'S GUITAR, by guitarist Alan Rinehart, is made up of six fantasies for solo guitar by 19th-century composer Josef (Johann) Kaspar Mertz. Each fantasy is based on an opera by Verdi, including such famous works as Nabucco, Rigoletto, Il Trovatore, and La Traviata.

RAVELLO RECORDS (RR7975)

www.alanrinehart.com

www.ravellorecords.com/catalog/rr7975



THROUGH GLASS I'ANA COTTON

I'ana Cotton's piece *The Return* is featured on **THROUGH GLASS**, a collection of new solo and chamber piano music. The composer's work bridges Ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu and French avant garde composer Olivier Messiaen, centering around a beautiful dark mode and the melodic variations it generates.

NAVONA RECORDS (NV6289)

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Recognising the value of music – for everyone

Last month I wrote about the increase in sales of classical recordings during the months of lockdown, something which speaks of the unquenchable desire among listeners to be able to hear music, whatever life throws in their path.

Just as encouraging is to have since discovered that this also holds true for streaming. According to Apple Music, its top three classical playlists grew by 31 per cent globally versus the previous two months. Universal Music, home to DG and Decca, likewise saw a significant increase in classical listening online relative to other genres. (Perhaps unsurprisingly, its 'Work From Home Classics' playlist was up almost 400 per cent in the past two months – a playlist which offers listeners Bach from both Víkingur Ólafsson and Murray Perahia before they've probably even opened their inbox). It's often said that people turn to classical music seeking calm or comfort in times of trouble or stress, and there's much truth in that – it's a sentiment often expressed to me by, particularly, new listeners to the genre. That our art form embodies a profundity or sublimity, and better still is recognised for doing so, is a compliment, not a cliché.

If online listening has soared, so, too, has online viewing. And it's remarkable how quickly attitudes to online video have changed in the past few months. Whether catching up with colleagues, friends or family, it's now become an accepted way of life. In these pages, we've been exploring the growth of streamed concerts and operas for almost a decade, informing readers about the extraordinary offerings from the likes of the Berliner Philharmoniker and



Martin

New York's Metropolitan Opera, the Gothenburg Symphony and the Royal Opera – all of which we talk to for our special 12-page focus on this ever-growing sector. And if this commitment to concerts and opera watchable at a click of a button serves us as an audience, we must in turn make sure it serves artists too. One of the themes that arises in our focus is how a 'new normal' might arise in which home viewers accept and expect to pay for performances – because the arts world desperately needs support, from all of us.

Just before we went to press, the UK government stepped up and stepped in with a huge and very welcome sum of money to keep our creative sector from collapsing: a rescue package worth £1.57bn. It followed some worrying weeks in which several organisations had begun announcing redundancies or even closures, but during which leading figures from across the arts world argued passionately for urgent aid.

While the substantial economic contribution of the arts to society was understandably oft cited in such statements, the arguments about its value above and beyond were what stood out most powerfully: about its ability to enrich and enhance (and, of course, also entertain) us, about its role in relating us to both our own culture and to those of strangers and future friends. These many heartfelt and eloquent expressions of what music and creativity means need not – indeed *should* not – be forgotten just because the funding has arrived; they should be retained and remembered, to serve always as a manifesto of art's value to the world, for whenever the need arises.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I've found the debate about Max Bruch's value as a composer unavoidable since my student days in Liverpool,' says

ANDREW MELLOR who appraises the composer in this issue as we mark the centenary of his death. 'In 2020, maybe it's time to simply enjoy the works I like and ignore those we don't.'



'It's the world's worst-kept secret that I am borderline obsessed with Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*,'

says **EDWARD SECKERSON**, author of our Collection this month. 'For me, it is his masterpiece – a glorious celebration of everything he represented, both as a musician and as a man.'



'Ian Bostridge is clearly the most intelligent singer in the English-speaking world,' says Musician and the Score

author **DAVID PATRICK STEARNS**, 'so I studied *An die ferne Geliebte* long and hard – and then discovered we'd rather discuss politics that day. Then again, political discussions easily lead back to Beethoven.'

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Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows
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Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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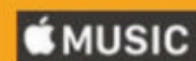
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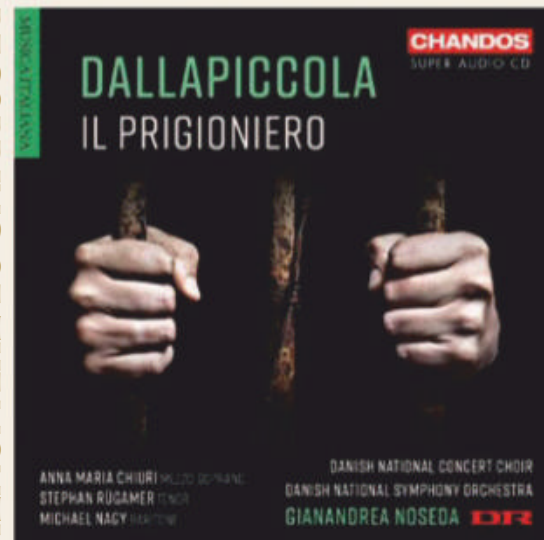
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BEAUTIFUL
NEW
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AUDIENCE

GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



DALLAPICCOLLA
Il prigioniero
Sols; Danish National
Symphony Choir &
Orchestra /
Gianandrea Noseda
Chandos
► **TIM ASHLEY'S
REVIEW IS ON
PAGE 32**

Gianandrea Noseda returns to the music of Dallapiccola with a powerful performance of his protest opera. Brilliantly performed, it's a significant addition to the composer's discography.



DEBUSSY
Images
Hallé Orchestra /
Sir Mark Elder
Hallé
This richly crafted

orchestral music finds perfect performers in Mark Elder and his superb-sounding Hallé, the Manchester ensemble on brilliant, shimmering form.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**



ELGAR Cello Concerto
CLYNE DANCE
Inbal Segev *vc*
London Philharmonic
Orchestra / Marin Alsop
Avie

A compelling rendition of the Elgar Concerto from cellist Inbal Segev, paired here with a heartfelt and striking new work by British composer Anna Clyne.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**



'BOHEMIAN TALES'
Augustin Hadelich *vn*
Charles Owen *pf*
Bavarian RSO /
Jakub Hrůša
Warner Classics

In orchestral and recital works alike, Augustin Hadelich's elegantly coloured tone and effortless virtuosity results in a rich feast of Czech fare.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**



R STRAUSS
Also sprach Zarathustra.
Metamorphosen
NHK Symphony
Orchestra / Paavo Järvi
RCA Red Seal

One choice among a whole series of online arrivals from the NHK and Paavo Järvi; their affinity for Richard Strauss's sound-world is deeply felt, and beautifully shaped.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**



BEETHOVEN
Violin Sonatas, Vol 1
Tamsin Waley-Cohen *vn*
Huw Watkins *pf*
Signum
Two of these sonatas

featured on these pages last month, but Tamsin Waley-Cohen and Huw Watkins, and their wonderful rapport, demonstrate the music offers joys in infinite approaches.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



ALKAN Grande Sonate
Mark Viner *pf*
Piano Classics
Mark Viner continues
his exploration
of Alkan's piano

music with another triumphant album, demonstrating an impressive affinity with this composer's music that reaps rewards once again.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



CLEVE
Missa Rex Babylonis
Cinquecento
Hyperion
This wonderful
album devoted to the

music of 16th-century composer Johannes de Cleve earns our critic Fabrice Fitch's praise as one of this excellent group's finest releases yet.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**



'CANTOS SAGRADOS'
National Youth
Choir of Scotland /
Christopher Bell
Signum

These impressive young singers embrace these pieces' contrasting demands with passion and style, offering a truly striking album of modern choral music.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



R STRAUSS
Die Frau ohne Schatten
Sols; Vienna State
Opera Chor & Orch /
Christian Thielemann
Orfeo

A second Straussian offering this month, this time from Christian Thielemann and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra on, as Hugo Shirley puts it, breathtaking form.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 78**



DVD/BLU-RAY
'LA PHIL 100'
Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra
C Major Entertainment
A major birthday – filmed a century to the day since the LA Phil's debut – marked by music and musicians with particular resonance for this fine orchestra.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 43**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
'THE COMPLETE WARNER RECORDINGS'
Sir John Barbirolli
Warner Classics
A very special box-set from Warner Classics to celebrate a towering figure in orchestral history: Glorious John's legacy lovingly presented across 109 separate CDs.
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**

FOR THE RECORD

The Polish-born violinist Ida Haendel has died

As a pupil of Carl Flesch and Enescu, Ida Haendel represented a Golden Age, writes Rob Cowan (in this edited version of his *Icons* tribute – see our website for the full article), but her extensive travels, her triumphs at the Proms and her ageless energy pinned her as much to the new generation as to the old. Born in 1928 to a Polish Jewish family in Chem, her talents came to the fore when, aged three, she picked up her sister's violin. Major competition triumphs followed (including winning the 1933 Huberman prize).

To describe Haendel as a last survivor from the virtuoso old guard would seem mildly glib; similarly, to say that she was an institution is rather like a half-hearted compliment. She was a true individual in every musical sense of the term. For those and other qualities, her art will forever be celebrated wherever there are listeners who know what quality violin playing is all about. As I've said before in these pages, whenever I tune in to Haendel on the radio without knowing who's playing, I invariably sit transfixed until the announcer gives the game away. I am never surprised, and



A true individual: Ida Haendel's career spanned most of the 20th century

yet discussions about 'great' fiddlers on disc too often relegate her to the sidelines.

Although Haendel's recording career reaches back to the shellac age, perhaps the pinnacle of her art on disc, apart from a magisterial late (1995) set of Bach solo works for Testament, are the recordings she made for Supraphon with the Czech Philharmonic and Prague Symphony orchestras. Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* enjoys biting attack and luscious tonal projection, and the Sibelius Concerto (both under Karel Ančerl) reminds us that Haendel's interpretation of this passionate perennial elicited a

fan letter from the composer himself, saying, 'I congratulate you on the great success, but most of all I congratulate myself, that my concerto has found an interpreter of your rare standard.' As to Wieniawski, listening to her scintillating version of his Second Concerto (also on Supraphon), we might recall that Haendel was a laureate of the first International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition in 1935 – she was just six years old.

Born December 13, 1928; died July 1, 2020



Online concerts as voting starts

Starting on Friday, July 24, *Gramophone* will be hosting an online series of concerts featuring our ten nominated orchestras for this year's Award. Each night one orchestra will offer a concert, usually under the baton of its chief conductor. Watch, enjoy and vote – and don't forget to listen to each ensemble's Apple Music playlist at apple.co/2MTIJZg.

July 24: Freiburger Barockorchester and Kristian Bezuidenhout; July 25: Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and Robin Ticciati; July 26: Bergen PO and Edward Gardner; July 27: NHK SO, Tokyo and Paavo Järvi; July 28: Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin; July 29: Los Angeles PO and Gustavo Dudamel; July 30: Orchestre National de Lille and Alexandre Bloch; July 31: BBC SO and Sakari Oramo; August 1: MusicAeterna and Teodor Currentzis; August 2: City of Birmingham SO and Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla. Visit gramophone.co.uk/awards for more information and full programme.

Live from London

For ten weeks from August 1, the Voces8 Foundation, with *Gramophone* as media partner, is hosting some of the world's finest choral groups for

a weekly concert to raise money for artists, venues and promoters to cover their Covid-19 losses, and to reunite the world's many singers, and audiences with much-needed live concerts. Broadcast in HD from the beautiful Voces8 Centre (St Anne and St Agnes Church), in the heart of the City of London, viewers will be able to pay for exclusive access to season or individual concert tickets.

Artists featured include Voces8, I Fagiolini, Stile Antico, The Swingle Singers, The Sixteen (from Kings Place), The Gesualdo Six, Apollo5, Chanticleer (from San Francisco) and a special guest appearance by The Academy of Ancient Music.

Season passes are £80 (£8 per concert, per household). Single concert tickets will be available for £12.50. For more information and tickets go to gramophone.co.uk/livefromlondon

New label for Sean Shibe

Pentatone, *Gramophone's* current Label of the Year, has announced the signing of the guitarist Sean Shibe. Shibe – whose latest album of Bach on the Delphian label topped the Specialist Classical Chart – will start this new relationship with an album of Spanish Impressionism linked to the French influences to be found on this music – Mompou, Poulenc, Falla and Ravel. His 2018 release 'softLoud', was given the inaugural Concept Album Award at the 2019 *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards.



PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDRÉ LE COZ/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES, IGA GOSZDOWSKA

Paris post for Klaus Mäkelä

The Finnish conductor Klaus Mäkelä has been appointed the new Music Director of the Orchestre de Paris, starting with the 2022-23 season. He adds the post to his forthcoming role as Chief Conductor and Artistic Adviser of the Oslo Philharmonic, a position that has recently already been extended by four years, taking it to a total of seven seasons. He is also Principal Guest Conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Artistic Director of the Turku Music Festival and Artist in Association with the Tapiola Sinfonietta. Mäkelä's appointment comes at the end of a lengthy process that started when Daniel Harding stepped down in 2019 after three seasons at the helm of the Orchestre de Paris.

RLPO names its new Chief

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra has named Domingo Hindoyan as its next Chief Conductor, starting in September 2021. He will succeed Vasily Petrenko, who is stepping down following 15 years in the post – a successful period which has included many acclaimed recordings – and who will take on the role of Conductor Laureate. The Venezuela-born conductor is an alumnus of the El Sistema programme; in 2013 he became first assistant to Daniel Barenboim at the Staatsoper Berlin. He is currently Principal Guest Conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra.



ONE TO WATCH

Samuel Mariño Male soprano

A true male soprano – that is, a man whose natural, modal voice is in the soprano range without singing falsetto – is a rare thing. One such is Samuel Mariño, a Venezuelan soprano whose love of Baroque music was ignited during his studies in Caracas, where he studied piano and ballet as well as singing, and who went on to study at the Conservatoire Régional de Paris, graduating in 2017. The physical attributes of a mature male voice that has not fully broken are as beneficial as they are unusual, and this voice perhaps gives us a glimpse of the unique sound world of an 18th-century castrato. Mariño harnesses his natural range and impressively agile coloratura to a distinctive vocal timbre that while clearly different from a female soprano also stands apart from celebrated falsettists such as Philippe Jaroussky or Franco Fagioli.

For his debut disc, now out on Orfeo (see Richard Wigmore's review on page 76), Mariño has chosen an imaginative selection



of rarely heard arias by Handel and Gluck. Although his repertoire extends beyond the Baroque (encompassing bel canto roles in Rossini, Bellini and Verdi, and even Maria in *West Side Story*) his natural territory seems destined to be the Baroque. In Paris he has benefitted from close mentoring from Barbara Bonney, and with such eminent support Mariño is set to go from strength to strength. We await future projects eagerly.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

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Podcasts

This month's podcasts include joint interviews with cellist Inbal Segev and conductor Marin Alsop as they discuss their new album pairing two very different cello concertos by Edward Elgar and Anna Clyne on Avie, plus violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen and pianist Huw Watkins sharing their insights into Beethoven's violin sonatas as they embark on a complete survey of the sonatas for Signum Classics, starting with Nos 1, 5 and 8. Both albums are named Editor's Choices this month.



Inbal Segev on the Gramophone Podcast

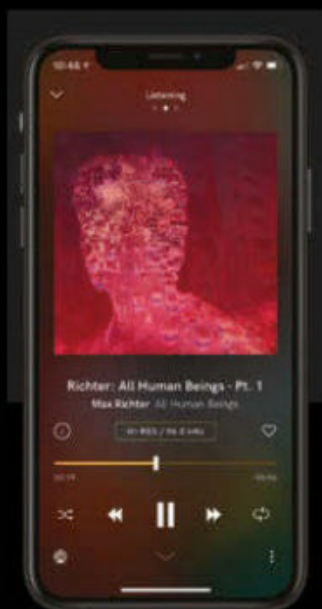
Orchestra of the Year 2020

Have you voted for your Orchestra of the Year 2020? This year's nominees are: BBC Symphony Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Freiburger Barockorchester, musicAeterna, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Lille and Philadelphia Orchestra. Visit gramophone.co.uk/awards to vote and to listen to our Orchestra of the Year playlists on Apple Music.

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Authentic Music Experience

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Martin Fröst on his Buffet Crampon 'Légende' boxwood clarinet in A

“Creating new windows into the future has always interested me. My ongoing, multi-year project 'Genesis' is proof of that [there have been two stages so far, 'Roots' and 'Exodus']. So I've been developing my repertoire, and also my instrument. I wanted to find a way of reincarnating old music – to look back before the birth of the modern clarinet to create a new core repertoire, and to see how we affect the past when we do this – and this led to my new 'Vivaldi' album.

What might Vivaldi have composed for the clarinet had the instrument been more developed in his time? I worked with Andreas N Tarkmann to create three 'new' clarinet concertos which borrow arias from Vivaldi's operas and oratorios. And it so happened that as we were starting working on this project back in 2018, Buffet Crampon asked me if I wanted to try a new prototype – and instantly it became clear that I could use this instrument for my Vivaldi project.

Back in 1999, following a big storm in France, the Paris-based showroom had bought a stock of boxwood. They stored it in the basement and eventually started doing some tests on it. This wood is much more fragile than grenadilla, the material most clarinets are made from these days, so they had to wait for many years without touching it because otherwise it would have cracked. By 2018, the Buffet Crampon magicians had come up with the prototype. Already, the Vivaldi music was in my mind – and now, with this instrument, I knew I would be able to give it a totally different flavour. Together with some other professional clarinetists, we worked on developing it, specifically the tuning which is at Baroque ensemble pitch (416Hz).

It has a singing, vocal quality which really suits this music. I tend to put lots of air through a clarinet – mine is a focused, speedy airstream.



But with this boxwood instrument, you can't play that way. You have to be a bit more relaxed because it's so much more sensitive to the airstream, but this is good because it means you have to be more flexible – which in turn is good for legato-playing and colour.

The keys are the same as on a modern instrument, so I felt at home with them straight away – when you hold the instrument in your hands, it feels very familiar. But the approach to the sound – the touch of the tongue, the way of leaning or not leaning on the sound – is more like playing recorder. It's a good combination – it's taking the old sound into the modern world, which is exactly what I wanted to achieve.

When I started out, I focused on trying to do things better than everyone else. But it's always good to take a step back, to remind yourself of why you wanted to play your instrument in the first place. And this project

has been a great education for me in discovering more colours in the sound. If you read letters from Brahms or Weber, they'll suggest varying the fingerings to create different colours – but that doesn't happen so much today. So it's been good to get inspired by this instrument, to be able to sound more mellow – in the slow movements of the concertos, for example, which Andreas insisted should be written in a register that would have been common for the chalumeau [one of the early versions of the clarinet, which had a very gentle sound]. Buffet Crampon are making me a B-flat version so that I can play with a modern orchestra – there's nothing wrong with playing on a boxwood instrument for Romantic music and backwards from there. And the next plan is to ask them to make a boxwood basset clarinet for me, so that I can re-record the Mozart Concerto. ”

► To read our review of Martin Fröst's Vivaldi album, turn to page 40

Keep calm and carry on recording!

Although the consequences of the pandemic have been less severe for record companies than for the live music sector, the widespread lockdown has still meant the tearing up of many recording schedules. Between late March and mid-June recording activity was largely put on hold, although a number of projects have arisen during this period of enforced isolation that were entirely unplanned.

We have become accustomed to watching musicians performing from home, and one of the most extraordinary examples has been **Igor Levit's** series of concerts from his Berlin home, in addition to his performance of Satie's *Vexations* (all 20 hours of it). The recorded legacy of Levit's stripped-out diary will be 'Encounter', expected on Sony Classical in September, which he recorded in late May in Berlin, combining Busoni, Reger and Feldman's final work, *Palais de Mari*.

Solo instrumental recordings are obviously easier to manage while maintaining social distancing than larger ensembles. **Stephen Hough** wasn't expecting to make any solo recordings during this time, but he has been able to set down three albums for Hyperion. The first of these, Schumann's *Kreisleriana* and C major *Fantasie*, will be out next year, and will be followed by Chopin's complete Nocturnes and a Schubert

album including the G major Piano Sonata, D894. **Alina Ibragimova** was expecting to record a concertos album by Michael Haydn with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, but when that was postponed she went into an empty studio to put down Paganini's *Caprices*. Another Hyperion solo album to look forward to comes from **Steven Isserlis**, who in August records a collection of English music from Britten to Walton.

Jonas Kaufmann has taken the opportunity to record an intimate Lieder recital with his regular partner **Helmut Deutsch**, which they managed to set down in Munich in April. We'll be able to hear the results in September. Other smaller ensembles are also returning to the studio. In July, **Roderick Williams** and the **Sacconi Quartet** gathered in Saffron Hall to record works by Roxanna Panufnik, while coming up in August **Iestyn Davies** and **Joseph Middleton** will record music by Thomas Adès and Nico Muhly, both albums for Signum.

Most encouraging of all is the return of larger ensembles to the recording studio. At the end of June, the **Freiburg Baroque Orchestra** went to the Teldex Studio in Berlin, maintaining the required 1.5-metre distancing at all times, and were joined by **Isabelle Faust**, **Jean-Guihen Queyras** and **Alexander Melnikov** for a recording of Beethoven's Triple Concerto for HM. If not quite something for everyone, there are at least a good many recordings to look forward to, and signs of more to come.

GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

Sarabande

Lindsay Kemp on this lively yet noble dance

By the Rio Grande they dance no sarabande on level banks like lawns above the glassy, lolling tide.' Sacheverell Sitwell's decision to open *The Rio Grande* with a positioning of the sarabande as the antithesis of raucous street music arises partly, no doubt, from the handy rhyme, but also from the stately nature of the dance familiar to us today from its role in, say, Bach's cello suites. Yet if we look at its history we find that, yes, it originated as a dance-song in Latin America, whence it arrived in Spain and Italy in the 16th century. Not only that, it was a lewd one: so socially dangerous did the *zarabanda* appear, that in 1583 Philip II tried to ban it. It was a lively little thing at this time, given added kick by alternations between 3/4 and 6/8 meters.

Its move into European art music came early in the 17th century, though for some reason it seems at this point to have split into two traditions. The fast *sarabanda* thrived in Italian guitar books and in music for continuo band, and in England in the suites and multi-movement fantasies of the likes of William Lawes and Matthew Locke; in 1676 the composer Thomas Mace was still describing 'sarabands' as 'toyish' and 'light'. But meanwhile in France composers for the lute and harpsichord such as Mouton, the Gaultiers, Chambonnières, Louis Couperin and d'Anglebert had been seeing the potential in it for something nobler, slowing



In France, the sarabande became nobler, 'grave'

the dance down, expanding its scale and deepening its emotional impact with directions such as 'grave', 'tendrement' or 'gracieusement'. Gradually this type predominated not just in France, but in Germany too, where it became lodged in the standard allemande-courante-sarabande-gigue sequence of the suite and found weighty

apotheosis in the examples for keyboard and solo cello by Bach.

The sarabande had become an instrumental piece in its own right by this time, but echoes of its original wavering rhythms were preserved in its triple-time metre with a gentle emphasis on the second beat, an easily recognisable and graceful tread that found its way into other forms such as the passacaglia and the much-explored *folia* variations, and even an underlying presence in the final chorus of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*.

The sarabande died off with the suite when the Classical style emerged in the mid-18th century. Modern-day examples are all referential, whether explicit (as in Satie's *Trois Sarabandes*) or half-submerged (Debussy's *Hommage à Rameau*). **G**

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

BBC Symphony Orchestra

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Echoing the incessant bashing of its parent organisation, kicking Britain's flagship broadcasting orchestra is a music industry sport. Corporation employees refer to the BBCSO as 'the works band'. Critics used to snipe that it can convincingly sightread a world premiere backwards but will struggle to keep a Brahms symphony on track. Among London musicians, the BBCSO was long thought of as the employer for cautious types who preferred a salary and pension to the cut-and-thrust of freelance life and world tours.

There's an alternative narrative. Unencumbered by commercial restraints, the BBCSO has always been Britain's orchestral maverick. It has more premieres to its name than any other ensemble of its size and, on a good day, levels of charisma that were a match even for Toscanini, who famously fell in love with it in 1935. Its audience dwarfs that of almost every other orchestra in the world; as the house orchestra for the BBC Proms, it plays the festival's opening and closing nights reaching a global television audience rivalled only by the Vienna Philharmonic.



Standards have oscillated since its first official concert on October 22, 1930 under Boult; Malcolm Sargent was the first to foster a sense of indifference in the ensemble that neither Boulez nor Rozhdestvensky could quite shake off. When the chemistry is wrong, that still rears its head. But Andrew Davis's tenure (1989-2000), showed once more what the modern BBCSO could do and Jiří Bělohlávek cultivated real, striking soul in the ensemble. Since 2013, Sakari Oramo (pictured) has tested its technical flair for new music but paid attention to general sectional sound, notably strings.

Three recording high points are Elgar (Boult), Boulez (Boulez) and Martinů (Bělohlávek). Always, the performance was heard on Radio 3 first – this orchestra was, after all, made for broadcasting. Perhaps that will ensure it's heard live, in some form, during this unusual summer – and that it can celebrate its 90th birthday in October with a performance thousands can hear. **Andrew Mellor**
Visit Gramophone's [Apple Music curator page](#) for a playlist

FROM WHERE I SIT

The middle-movement ordering of Mahler's Sixth is obvious if you look for the clues, Edward Seckerson



Back in June, I reviewed (none too favourably) an account of Mahler's tragic and prophetic Sixth Symphony from the Essen Philharmonic Orchestra under their General Music Director Tomáš Netopil which was the third recording in recent times (the others being from Pappano and Currentzis) to favour the original ordering for the inner movements: *Scherzo – Andante*. Netopil's decision to do so was especially telling since it was in Essen that the work's world premiere took place in 1906 under the composer's direction (but with the middle movements reversed). So why the change of heart between the symphony's dry run that took place in Vienna prior to Essen (in the presence of none other than Richard Strauss), which followed the original order, and that world premiere?

This has become a vexed question among committed Mahlerians over the years and everyone, musicologists and nerds alike, have held true to their preference. Fair enough. It's a musical and aesthetic choice regardless of the evidence which exists in favour of either option. But I wanted to lend some clarity and jump on that soap box one more time. In 1963 the critical edition of the score adhered to the original order, *Scherzo – Andante*, but in 2004 the Kaplan Foundation (that is the late Gilbert Kaplan – thereby hangs another tale) made a compelling case for the Essen revision and the new critical edition followed suit. At the forefront of Kaplan's evidence was the fact that Mahler never again reverted to the original ordering in his lifetime. Not true.

But consider for a moment just how daring the original conception was – the *Scherzo* as a developing variant, a distorted mirror image, of the first movement. The relentless advance of A minor defiantly achieving A major in the final moments of the first movement only to be pitched back into the minor with the *Scherzo*'s driving incessancy but now with an even uglier limp in its gait. All that connecting tissue is lost when these two movements, like Siamese twins, are separated. So when Richard Strauss made light of the work's unremitting grimness following that Vienna try-out is it possible that Mahler simply lost his nerve and opted for the more obvious, less extreme, option?

It is true that the *Andante*'s E flat major is at farthest remove from the A major at the close of the first movement offering a telling remoteness by contrast – but all my musical sensibilities scream for the original ordering and I cannot imagine a Bernstein or a Tennstedt being persuaded otherwise. Indeed when I visited Tennstedt to talk Mahler at his home in Kiel back in the 1980s he thumped the table in that way he had of punctuating passionate views when I dared broach the question of the alternative ordering.

But more persuasive still was Mahler's biographer Henry-Louis de La Grange who wrote to me following my review of Rattle's CBSO recording of the Sixth (originally spread over two CDs so you couldn't 'reprogramme' his *Andante – Scherzo* ordering!) and was himself unequivocal about Mahler's final preference. What's more he was in possession of a handbill which proved conclusively that Mahler did in fact perform the Sixth in its original ordering before he left us. Case closed? Each to his own, I say.

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MUSIC AT HOME

A SPECIAL FOCUS ON ONLINE CONCERTS AND OPERA

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Uniting both players and audiences globally via streaming: Víkingur Ólafsson (in Reykjavík) and Edward Gardner at the Bergen International Festival in May

HOUSE MUSIC

Where has the growth of concert and operas online led us to – and where will it lead us next?

Martin Cullingford introduces our section exploring the topic, and identifies some key themes

Being readers of *Gramophone*, there's a fair chance you enjoy watching opera or concerts online. When some of the world's leading ensembles and venues are making so many of their performances available to stream, why wouldn't you? And if you weren't doing so before the coronavirus silenced most of the world's auditoriums, there's a significantly higher chance you're doing so now. Streaming statistics over these past troubled months have zoomed, as the insatiable appetite by audiences worldwide for music-making has been met by some of the major players.

So the summer of 2020 seems an apposite time for us to explore this now firmly established part of the musical scene. As well as encouraging even more people to step virtually into the hallowed halls of the New York Met, Berlin's Philharmonie or the like, the pandemic has posed new questions, not least about what performances are being streamed, and why, and who should pay for it.

But step away from the urgency of the hour, and it's a topic that well deserves the focus that follows across the next 10 pages, regardless of the present challenges. Digital streaming of concerts has, literally, changed the way global audiences access music – and those two aforementioned pioneers of this sector both underline the global. The Berliner Philharmoniker's

Digital Concert Hall deservedly features heavily in the pages to come, but it's worth pausing here to look at its audience: Germany, the home market, accounts for only 14 per cent of viewers, while the rest of Europe accounts for 40 per cent, North America 20 per cent, and Asia 25 per cent. This isn't about growing physical visitors to the famous Berlin hall, but serving an entirely different audience – an international, digital one. Recordings have always done this of course – thanks to the medium, how many readers feel a close affinity with orchestras, without having ever seen them play in person? – but this is a powerful extension of that concept.

For Peter Gelb, who runs New York's Metropolitan Opera, the iconic venue's impressive online broadcasts are an extension of the tradition of 'the Met's pioneering role as a radio broadcaster which goes back to 1931 ... when it became a staple of American culture, and educated generations of Americans about opera'. Television productions further built on this in the 1970s, and when Gelb arrived in 2005 he was 'determined to continue down the road of producing media and examining new technologies which had come into existence in the digital era'. The outcome was the phenomenally successful cinema streams which in happier times reach audiences of 250,000 in every continent apart from Antarctica. Met Opera on Demand

was then a natural extension – taking these beautifully recorded performances directly into people’s homes. Scrolling through the menu of what’s on offer reveals an extraordinary selection of acclaimed productions, there for a relatively modest \$15 a month – or \$150 a year. There are currently around 33,000 paying subscribers – double what it was before the pandemic hit. The Met had pursued a strategy during lockdown of making one performance from the archive available for a limited time, every day – and people liked what they saw. It has also attracted 3000 new donors: what began as an attempt to offer people art when they most needed it has been rewarded with goodwill, and growth in online revenue.

The pandemic, of course, is – we hope – an unusual situation, and the normal, or ‘new normal’, may see different response and revenue rates. But this brings us on to another important aspect: paying for content. In the internet’s infancy, many, if not most newspapers responded by putting their content online for free. The result was a plunge in revenue for them, and only now is the painful backtracking beginning to create newly sustainable business models. The recording industry was perhaps more circumspect and sensible, and a paid subscription to a streaming service is consequently a fairly accepted expense of listening life. But what about online opera or concerts? It’s a debate which has become urgent in recent weeks, as artists ponder an immediate future in which revenue from live performances will drastically decrease. If – as we’ve seen – online music has soared, how might that audience help pay artists’ bills?

One of the first festivals to respond to concert hall closures with a rich online offering was the Bergen International Festival, which in mid-May, after six weeks’ frantic planning, managed to offer an online audience live performances from locally based stars (Edward Gardner, Leif Ove Andsnes) as well as streamed-in performances from those as yet unable to travel, such as the pianist Víkingur Ólafsson. It was a much-needed tonic to a traumatised sector. It was also a lifeline to the festival and its colleagues and collaborators. While the festival still lost almost £1m revenue in ticket sales, it could keep its funding and sponsorship and fulfil its mission ‘to make art available, and give jobs to artists, technicians, freelancers – everyone’, as Festival Director Anders Beyer puts it. ‘We did not want to stay quiet’, he adds, and their endeavours were rewarded with approaching a million streams in 116 countries, a figure which continues to grow as most of the events are still available to watch. That international reach is important – Beyer speaks of how moving it was to see live comments coming from across the globe, and indeed the festival is exploring ways to build on that, including reaching into the vast and musically passionate Chinese audience – but so too is reaching people much closer to him, those ‘who cannot afford to travel, or those in local elderly homes, or prisons, or people with health issues which have prevented them from visiting us previously – we are democratising the art’.

As he puts it, ‘the good old days’ won’t come back, as digital performance grows and issues such as the environmental impact of touring start to change practices. ‘We should not only survive in this new reality, we should thrive and be happy in it – we should redefine what is “the fireplace”, and think about how we share experiences but not in the same room. This is a total shift in perspective.’ Next year’s festival will build on the online offering – and, crucially, charge for it. ‘If we offer art for free because we can afford to do so, we undermine the whole

market, we undermine the whole freelance market and we should also make a shift in people’s minds that art costs – you should pay for art.’ And while collaborations between venues on co-productions are normal, Beyer also imagines a possibility where ‘a group of best-in-class festivals throughout the world share each other’s digital productions throughout the world. Let’s say you pay for a festival pass in Bergen but if you pay a little extra you get access to festivals in Europe and overseas – you create a real community of festivals sharing each others’ audiences and productions.’

Another Scandinavian organisation committed to online broadcast is the Gothenburg SO, and like the Met, they too have experienced huge growth during the pandemic – from up to 150,000 views a month to around 400,000 – and like all those discussed so far, the international reach shows the ensemble able to engage beyond the geographic boundaries that might once have defined audiences: half is Swedish, followed by the US, then Germany. Demographically, the target audience is aged 25 to 55 online – whereas the hall’s audience is closer to the upper end of that range.


According to Måns Pär Fogelberg, Producer of GSOPlay (also see page 20), ‘We have seen extra material like interviews

gain in interest and viewing, so maybe people have more time to dig into what they’re consuming.’ The digital team continues to explore what’s possible: it has been experimenting with formats,

a live interview studio has been embedded into the auditorium, and a recent National Day concert took music-making into wider society (the result was significant viewing figures).

Another positive for ensembles pursuing this path is that of attracting sponsors, who have also sought visibility for their support. ‘With GSOPlay, it’s easy to find ways for a sponsor to be visible and to take part in what we do,’ says Fogelberg. A perfect example is that the orchestra has just signed an agreement with the city’s tourist organisation to start collaborating on live broadcasts, while technology and engineering company Cobham is also on board as a sponsor. Furthermore, adds Fogelberg, ‘You could say GSOPlay has been the most important thing in the last 20 years for securing government funding because we can always show that we are available for a lot of people.’

So just a few excellent examples from the opera, orchestral and festival worlds – a snapshot shedding some light on where this may all be heading, and setting the scene for what follows over the next few pages. With the launch of paid-for online concert platforms from labels like Deutsche Grammophon and streaming service Idagio, the sector will continue to evolve. But back to Berlin, and to the lockdown legacy. As James Jolly reports on page 17, during lockdown the Digital Concert Hall saw a huge increase in the number of new registrations. In fact, says the BPO’s Olaf Maninger, ‘We had as many people in the Digital Concert Hall 24 hours a day as we would normally have when streaming live from the Philharmonie.’

Round-the-clock music-making on demand: it’s here to stay, and already established as a major part of how today’s audiences experience live performance. How it evolves will be fascinating for audiences and organisations alike. 

Met Opera on Demand – metopera.org/season/on-demand/

Digital Concert Hall – digitalconcerthall.com

Bergen International Festival – fib.no

GSOPlay – gso.se/en/gsoeplay/



WHY BERLIN?

When lockdown silenced the musical world, one city harnessed its creative energy to make the music play again – online, as **James Jolly** reports

‘Paris is always Paris and Berlin is never Berlin,’ Jack Lang, a former French Culture Minister, once said. And how right he was because this is a city that never stands still. Always attuned to the musical zeitgeist, Berlin’s status as a major creative centre was reinforced dramatically during the past few months of lockdown. Here is a city that moved fast, imaginatively and put its stamp on the musical world with characteristic entrepreneurial zeal.

When the concert halls and operas houses closed their doors around March 12, the silence in the city didn’t last for long. And a key mover and shaker in this new online musical world was Berlin resident since 2016 (yet whose family roots in the city go back to the 17th century), the British violinist Daniel Hope. ‘I think Berlin has always been a hothouse of artistic electricity. And the interesting thing about the beginning of the shutdown is that obviously all of the artists were locked down together, and they all had this tremendous need to get out there and make music somehow. And because there are so many interesting artists in this town, I think it created a kind of self-ignition.’

Hope’s online house concerts ‘Hope@Home’ ran to 34 episodes, broadcast by Arte from the violinist’s living room (with superb sound and production values), and was watched by millions – tens of thousands every night. He then took Hope@Home on tour, repeating the success from different venues around the city and then around the country. ‘That I could pick up the phone and reach Simon Rattle was a miracle, let alone getting him to come over the next day and play the piano in my living room. I think it was a mixture of lucky circumstances and the channelling of this enormous energy that exists in this

town – plus when you shut [music] down it becomes a kind of forbidden fruit. There was a feeling that we couldn’t let Berlin die, basically, and I think everybody felt they had to react.’

And react they did: at the same time that Hope was launching his soirées, the pianist Igor Levit made a spontaneous decision. ‘Walking home with my groceries’, he told *The Observer*’s Fiona Maddocks, ‘I thought: “Hey, wait a second ...” Sharing what I do with an audience justifies my entire existence as a musician. Without it, literally, I fall sick. There and then, I stopped, put down my grocery bags in the street, and tweeted that I’d be performing a “house concert” at 7pm that night.’ Levit is a major figure in his adopted Germany, not simply because he is a phenomenal player (he took *Gramophone*’s Recording of the Year in 2016), but because he is a sought-after cultural and political commentator in a country where discourse at this level is expected. He gave 52 concerts on Twitter, including one broadcast from the German President’s official residence, and capped the initiative with a performance of Erik Satie’s *Vexations*, all 20 hours of it. Shortly after, Deutsche Grammophon – which had moved from Hamburg to Berlin in 2011 – mobilised its local artists (including Daniel Barenboim, Seong-Jin Cho and Matthias Goerne) for a series called ‘Moment Musical’, streaming concerts that offered some of today’s leading musicians in broadcasts whose production values were similarly very high. It was not only a powerful statement that classical music could overcome the pause in traditional concert-going, but it kept these artists before the public at a time when many simply vanished (often for justifiable reasons, like looking after the family, or simply a discomfort about performing for an unresponsive camera). And the daily opera

performances from Berlin's Staatsoper rewarded the foresight of whoever felt that filming every production was an investment for the future.

Mention of the German President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, is perhaps another key to the country's predominant role in the world of classical music. Many of the members of the German government are passionate music lovers – Angela Merkel is a regular visitor to Bayreuth – and Monika Grütters, Merkel's Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, has a genuine love of music. As Daniel Hope puts it, 'She *burns* for culture. And to have a politician who is willing to go out on a limb and say, "I'm not going to let these institutions die" – that's very brave in this day and age when everything is about finance and about corporate success.' Consider the German government's swift emergency injection of upwards of a billion euros into the country's arts and draw your own conclusions ...

One of *Gramophone's* contributors, Hugo Shirley, has lived in Berlin for three and a half years and now works for the classical streaming service Idagio. He brings the objectivity and perspective of a relative newcomer: 'There's an understanding here that classical music is part of a broader cultural offering which needs to be there. It has a much more central position rooted in national pride and the fact that Germany still feels itself – whether explicitly or not – as the cradle of classical music and Berlin has that sense as well. Amateur music-making is very rich here; my impression is that it's a more seamless music world that goes from your amateur musicians all way up to the top and the Berlin Phil. Nowhere is there a cut-off point where you switch from being just an amateur to a serious musician. Berlin is rightly proud of its three opera houses and eight orchestras. And it has this desire to spread the love around the world a little bit – and technology is the best way to do that. So, there are lots of major Germany companies who are happy to fund that. They like to see themselves associated with something that has a really significant cultural value and standing. I imagine that's why Deutsche Bank supports the Berlin Phil's Digital Concert Hall. It reflects very well on them globally but also on a national level, to be seen to be supporting something that is culturally so significant.'

The Berliner Philharmoniker's Digital Concert Hall, launched in 2008, remains seemingly unassailable as the global



Igor Levit performing Erik Satie's Vexations – all 840 (identical) pages of it



Daniel Hope launched his @Home series from his living room early in lockdown

showcase of one of the world's greatest orchestras. Its archive is extraordinarily rich, essentially cataloguing the work of four chief conductors – Herbert von Karajan, Claudio Abbado, Sir Simon Rattle and, now, Kirill Petrenko – and numerous guests. It was Karajan's vision that allowed the orchestra's home – the Philharmonie, which opened in 1963 – to evolve quite organically to a point where video overtook audio. The control rooms, high up and with spectacular views down into the hall, were there from the start.

A subscription service from its launch, the DCH offered a special voucher during the first couple of months of lockdown that gave free access to new visitors for 30 days. Olaf Maninger, Berliner Philharmoniker Principal Cellist and General Manager of Berlin Phil Media GmbH, points out that 'we made the choice right from the very start of the Digital Concert Hall 12 years ago that it's not a service for free. We make high-end productions with huge cultural value. We have

to deal with rights and licensing and production costs – and if you want to have fantastic artistic content someone has to pay for it. We offered people a voucher where they get their first 30 days' subscription for free. It was the chance for everyone to get a feeling for what we do. There were subscribers who were paying, and there were new people who were coming to the Digital Concert Hall for the first time. The idea of

making art and culture for free is completely wrong. It was a chance to bring the Digital Concert Hall to a big public.' There is clearly a distinction between 'free' and 'free for a month', and as a shop-window exercise it paid huge dividends. 'We

have normally expected about 10,000 user registrations, but for the last two months it's been more like 700,000. People are interested in what we're doing and we've tried to give them a live experience in the Digital Concert Hall with things like our Easter Festival, and Petrenko did the May 1 Europa Concert as well as two more concerts with a small configuration of the Berliner Philharmoniker.'

The creative electricity that Daniel Hope referred to has galvanised numerous new ventures in the city, but it has been in the air for a long time. Till Janczukowicz, founder and CEO of Idagio, grew up in Aachen but would visit his grandmother in Berlin as a boy (she was a friend of Claudio Arrau when he

'The arts scene and the tech scene really merge in Berlin. So, the city's a real hotbed for innovation when it comes to combining the two' – Clemens Trautmann, President, DG



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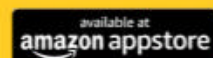
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Berlin's Philharmonie, the home of the Berliner Philharmoniker and (right) its Digital Concert Hall whose studios nestle high up in Hans Scharoun's still striking building

studied in the city with Martin Krause), and his parents, both school teachers, would come to Berlin for a week at a time to sample the abundant culture on offer – the Deutsche Oper, the Berliner Philharmoniker and Karajan, and much more. ‘Even as a six year old, I knew this was a special city,’ he says. ‘And when the wall came down, the cellist Boris Pergamenschikow – who was my mentor – said, ‘This is the place to be’, and I thought, ‘Yes, you’re right. This *is* the place to be!’


Janczukowicz acknowledges the special creative climate of the city – the government support for the arts, the respect in which classical music is held by all strata of society regardless of whether they are actual consumers – but he also highlights a practical element. ‘Seven or eight years ago, venture capitalists from Silicon Valley started to come to Berlin and since the property prices back in California are colossal, they realised that Berlin was a great alternative. It’s a city to have fun in because it’s still not expensive. When you look at living expenses here it’s much cheaper than, say, London. Here you can live in the centre of the city and not be a millionaire!’

Located in Berlin’s funky and arts-oriented district of Kreuzberg, once one of the city’s poorest areas and now swiftly being gentrified, Idagio is a rarity in the streaming world in that it focuses only on classical music. As Janczukowicz explains, ‘I didn’t give up being an artist manager in my mid-forties to become a start-up entrepreneur. It would be crazy! When we were raising our first external investment we didn’t raise it for a classical music streaming service. Not at all. The fundamental, underlying question at the beginning was “How can we use technology to maintain and even boost classical music in the 21st century?” And the first answer was that the future of listening to music outside the concert hall – where I came from – is streaming. However, if you look at a streaming service and describe it in a quite unromantic way it is nothing other than a pipeline business where you are licensing rights from gatekeepers and they give you a lot of constraints and also the right to design a kind of business model with low margins. And that’s it. However, if you look at the classical music ecosystem, it’s all about the artists and the audiences. They’re at the centre of it.’

Focusing on the artist has been accelerated by the cessation of live music-making during lockdown. And here we come to yet another key to Berlin’s success – the ease with which partnerships are struck. Such ventures come effortlessly in the city, says Clemens Trautmann, the President of Deutsche Grammophon (and formerly with Axel Springer, Europe’s largest digital publishing house – which, incidentally, has

a former musicologist, Matthias Döpfner, as its Chairman and CEO). ‘I see a lot of these developers and start-up entrepreneurs at our Yellow Lounge events. The arts scene and the tech scene really merge in Berlin. So, the city is a real hotbed for innovation when it comes to combining the arts and technology. It’s quite wonderful to work with partners like Idagio and the Digital Concert Hall in this space.’ Emerging from the recent silence is Idagio’s new, ticketed Global Concert Hall, and early streams have included Zubin Mehta conducting in Florence and Franz Welser-Möst and the Vienna Philharmonic, no less, for €9.90 a ticket.

Daniel Hope is also quick to point to this partnership culture when it comes to Hope@Home. ‘The fact that I’m able to do this show, and that Arte – which is 99 per cent funded by the licence payer, and a European ideal – can support it is remarkable. Arte is probably the most active broadcaster in the world at the moment, in terms of culture. That also says a lot about that mindset here, and there are many, many young people who realise that culture is the glue that binds everything together in our world.’

By chance or by design, Berlin has perhaps given us a glimpse into our musical future, a coming together of tech and live music – combined with a very quick despatching of many people’s resistance to video – that is slowly moving from free to paid (witness the timely arrival of Deutsche Grammophon Premium, a new portal for music to watch as well as listen to). For the Berliner Philharmoniker, the Digital Concert Hall has literally become another venue for its music-making; for Idagio, the streaming world has opened up to embrace live music-making that actually benefits the performers; for Deutsche Grammophon, the traditional boundaries of what a record label can – or perhaps *should* – do have shifted; and for artists like Igor Levit and Daniel Hope, the one element that has returned to their lives is spontaneity: schedules are no longer measured in years, it’s all about what shall I play tomorrow? For Hugo Shirley, the Berliner Philharmoniker is a perfect example of how the city has harnessed many of the powerful currents swirling around it: ‘One of its selling points is its tradition, and its sound, yet, from Karajan onwards, it has always been very innovative. It’s perhaps no surprise that in a city like Berlin – and it’s a relatively small city – the result of the coming together of tradition and this powerful start-up mentality is going to have pretty spectacular results. And the past few months have shown Berlin at its most creative.’ 

Digital Concert Hall - digitalconcerthall.com

Idagio - app.idagio.com/live

DG Stage - dg-premium.com/dg-stage/

CURTAIN UP, CAMERAS ON!

Bringing a concert or an opera to the screen is a complex process but, says Sarah Kirkup, the best video directors can produce an experience to rival the thrills found in any hall or theatre

Quick! Check the aperture of Camera No 4 – good, that’s better now.’
‘How about we start with two trombones and then glide? Could that work?’
GSOplay producer Måns Pär Fogelberg is in Gothenburg Concert Hall’s control room, clarifying the final details with his two-man camera team. The piece is *Finlandia*, the conductor is Santtu-Matias Rouvali – and there are just minutes until he brings the baton down. But despite the adrenalin pumping, the atmosphere is jovial and relaxed.

Admittedly, this is a dress rehearsal for the filming team, which comprises a vision mixer (Fogelberg), a score reader and two (or sometimes three) cameramen who use joysticks to operate up to 11 remote-controlled cameras positioned within

the hall. But the stakes are still high. Each concert is performed twice, and while it’s the second concert that’s broadcast live, it will then be edited, possibly using material from this ‘back-up’ first-concert version, before being uploaded onto the GSOplay app. The margin for error is, therefore, extremely small. ‘It’s like being a fighter pilot,’ admits Fogelberg.

Since it started in 2012, GSOplay has seen a massive increase in demand for its free, online content. On average, there are 150,000 people watching every month (though this figure has more than doubled in lockdown), a significant proportion of them younger than in-house audiences. And GSOplay is not alone. Many orchestras, not least the Berliner Philharmoniker and its pioneering Digital Concert Hall, have found new audiences via filmed content, much of which is not only broadcast



The 'GSOplay way': vision mixer Måns Pär Fogelberg (far left) and three cameramen

live online but also streamed to cinemas. Similarly, opera companies have upped their game, with the Met, the Royal Opera House and others significantly expanding their digital offerings during the past decade to satisfy the public's growing appetite for opera on both the big screen and DVD/Blu-ray.

Technological advances and the transformation of film-directing into an artistic endeavour have led to exceptional production values. Filmed in high-definition video and audio, these performances are a joy to watch and the overall viewing experience can be tremendously exciting. But there's more. A film has the potential to communicate the intentions of the composer, or opera director, even more effectively than the live performance itself.

The creative process of filming a concert or opera can vary hugely, but the aim is always to create a unique musical experience for the viewer that, while it can't compete with the live event, can stand alongside it. In Gothenburg, the 'GSOplay way', as Fogelberg calls it, relies on improvisation: 'We don't script all the camera shots because that can become boring. It's about the in-house team working together, contributing ideas. It's efficient, fun and creative, but it comes with risk factors.'

Preparation is key. First, the score is sent to a score reader, who determines the visual focus throughout. This isn't as obvious as it may sound – 'Sometimes they'll suggest we should cut away from the main tune to enhance the countermelody, for example,' says Fogelberg. Decisions regarding the quantity and positions of the cameras are also made in advance, by Fogelberg in collaboration with the camera operators. Five cameras are in a fixed position, but six of them can move depending on repertoire and orchestral layout. The microphone set-up, established by sound engineer Lars Nilsson in 2013, is based on classic Decca technology, using three microphones in a T-shape over the conductor, a pair for balancing woodwind and percussion, and a couple more for hall ambience. 'We film close, so we want the sound to be close,' says Fogelberg.

'We know who'll give us "reaction" shots ... but if a player didn't like a close-up, they'll come and tell us!' – Måns Pär Fogelberg, GSOplay

By the dress rehearsal, the team will be trying out different camera shots and figuring out how to connect them. 'If we see that something works well, we'll write it in the score,' says Fogelberg. 'But we'll only fix down certain shots.' Even without a script, though, both nights tend to end up being filmed in a similar way, probably because, as Fogelberg says, 'we've grown tightly together as a team. I don't decide how to shoot the oboe, or the trumpets – that's down to the cameramen, they're the creators. They'll respond to the score reader's cue by suggesting how they could execute a particular shot. My role is to take their input and adapt it, to choose when and how to get from one shot to another by punching the right camera angle at the right time.'

Being an in-house team means that they have built up a strong rapport with the musicians, which can also shape Fogelberg's decisions. 'We know which players are good listeners, who we can go to for "reaction" shots,' he says. Similarly, the players feel comfortable enough to feed back: 'If someone didn't like a particular close-up, they'll come and say, "Can you please use a different angle next time!"'

In Berlin, the players exert an even greater influence. 'The Digital Concert Hall is their project, so it needs to be a cooperative process,' says Christoph Franke, recording/creative producer at the Berliner Philharmoniker where the DCH began in 2008. 'At first, we needed to convince them – they were anxious the cameras might be intrusive. Now, most of them have realised the DCH is a wonderful tool to communicate with – but if they don't like something, they'll tell us.'

The possibility of that seems slim. The DCH is a slick operation that leaves little to chance. Every concert programme is filmed – a busy schedule that has barely let up during lockdown. After the dress rehearsal, each concert is performed three times, which gives the filming team three chances to get it right. But the process will have begun two weeks earlier, with the video director receiving a copy of the score and beginning



GSO's orchestra manager Andreas Lindahl and chief conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali in a socially distanced live session in May

his own preparations. This involves listening to a recording that's closest to the conductor's view of the piece, and marking in which instruments he'd like to film, and when. 'There are obvious things, like solos, where he'll know what to focus on,' says Franke, 'but other decisions are purely artistic: "Who do I focus on in a *tutti*? When do I focus on the conductor? How often do I cut, and how fast do the edits need to be? If it's a slow movement, should I let it flow? If it's a rhythmic section, should my cuts support the structure?"' Essentially, a good director will allow himself to be inspired by the way a conductor conducts, and the more experienced he is, the more convincingly he'll be able to capture the interaction between musicians. In turn, this can affect how we hear the music. 'The best director tells us something about the piece that perhaps we hadn't previously realised,' says Franke.

'Our aim is for viewers to feel like they are in the hall with the orchestra, to be immersed in the sound' – Christoph Franke, DCH

A week before the dress rehearsal, the director will send his score to his assistant, who'll turn it into a shot list: this pinpoints which camera is to be used and when, what it's filming, and how long it's filming for. These shots will then be programmed, enabling them to be recalled from the preset list during the concert. For the sound team, however, recording begins now, at the dress, because, as Franke explains, 'it's an important fall-back option. There'll be no coughing or audience noise, so we can use it for repairs and patching.'

At the first concert, the video team will try out the director's script for the first time. A small percentage of cuts won't work, so corrections will be made to the shot list, ready for the second concert. 'This is the serious one, when we try to do everything perfectly,' says Franke. By the third concert, which is broadcast live, the team is more than ready. Even so, a 'polished' version will subsequently be uploaded into the archive.

Like GSOpay, the DCH's video team (based in a studio high up in the Philharmonie) comprises four people – the director, director's assistant, camera operator and score reader. There are eight cameras installed in the hall which are mostly

fixed and, as in Gothenburg, remote-controlled. However, the DCH will often have one manned camera in addition. This camera is positioned in the stalls, with the camera operator receiving instructions via a headset. And then there's the fixed-position, remote-controlled 'fingers' camera for solo pianists, which allows an exhilaratingly close-up view of the bass notes being struck.

Again like GSOpay, this video team films in 4K (Ultra HD) – an improvement on standard HD which allows cameras to get closer to the action without pixellation, and to pick out intricate details, even from the back of the hall.

But when it comes to sound,

the Berliners are looking to be pioneers once again. Franke and his team are currently researching 3D/surround-sound methods, which will allow for home viewers to have a truly immersive aural experience. For now, though, stereo sound remains the standard, achieved by two main mics positioned to strike a balance between orchestral clarity and diffused sound from the hall. Five more mics hang above the rim of the stage, creating a connecting sound picture of the orchestra. And then there are several spot mics, placed close to the orchestra, for added detail. Overall, says Franke, his aim is for viewers 'to feel like they're in the hall with the orchestra, to be immersed in the sound and to have a coherent experience of the performance both in terms of its structure and its acoustical envelopment'.

From the DCH's archive, it's fascinating to watch the concerts conducted by Karajan during the 1970s. With the maestro dominating almost every shot, they're a clear indicator of the extent to which filming techniques have advanced since then. And the same goes for the world of opera, as *Gramophone* critic and opera director Mike Ashman reflects. 'These older films were very star-focused,' he says. 'Filmmakers seemed to think that Pavarotti, or Domingo, or Te Kanawa, was the main interest – it was like a moving picture for fans.' With Brian Large leading the way in the 1970s, things took a turn for the better. As the video director says in a *Gramophone* interview in 2001, 'I want [to create] something which is valid and truthful to artist, composer and public.'

In 1979, Large directed Patrice Chéreau's *Götterdämmerung* from Bayreuth, a film that still holds up today, says Ashman – partly because Chéreau was a filmmaker himself but, crucially, because he collaborated extensively with Large to communicate his vision. 'They got the scale of it,' says Ashman. 'There's not a single moment on screen that doesn't work as well as it did in the theatre.'

Ashman has since witnessed improvements in how singers cope with the presence of cameras, which are themselves far less conspicuous than they used to be. But the single most important development has continued to be that relationship between the two directing teams: 'The closer link between the staging and filming teams has made all the difference,' he says. Ashman recalls Keith Warner's 2006 *Ring* cycle for the Royal Opera House, for which his late wife Claire Glaskin was the choreographer. When Jonathan Haswell was filming it (though

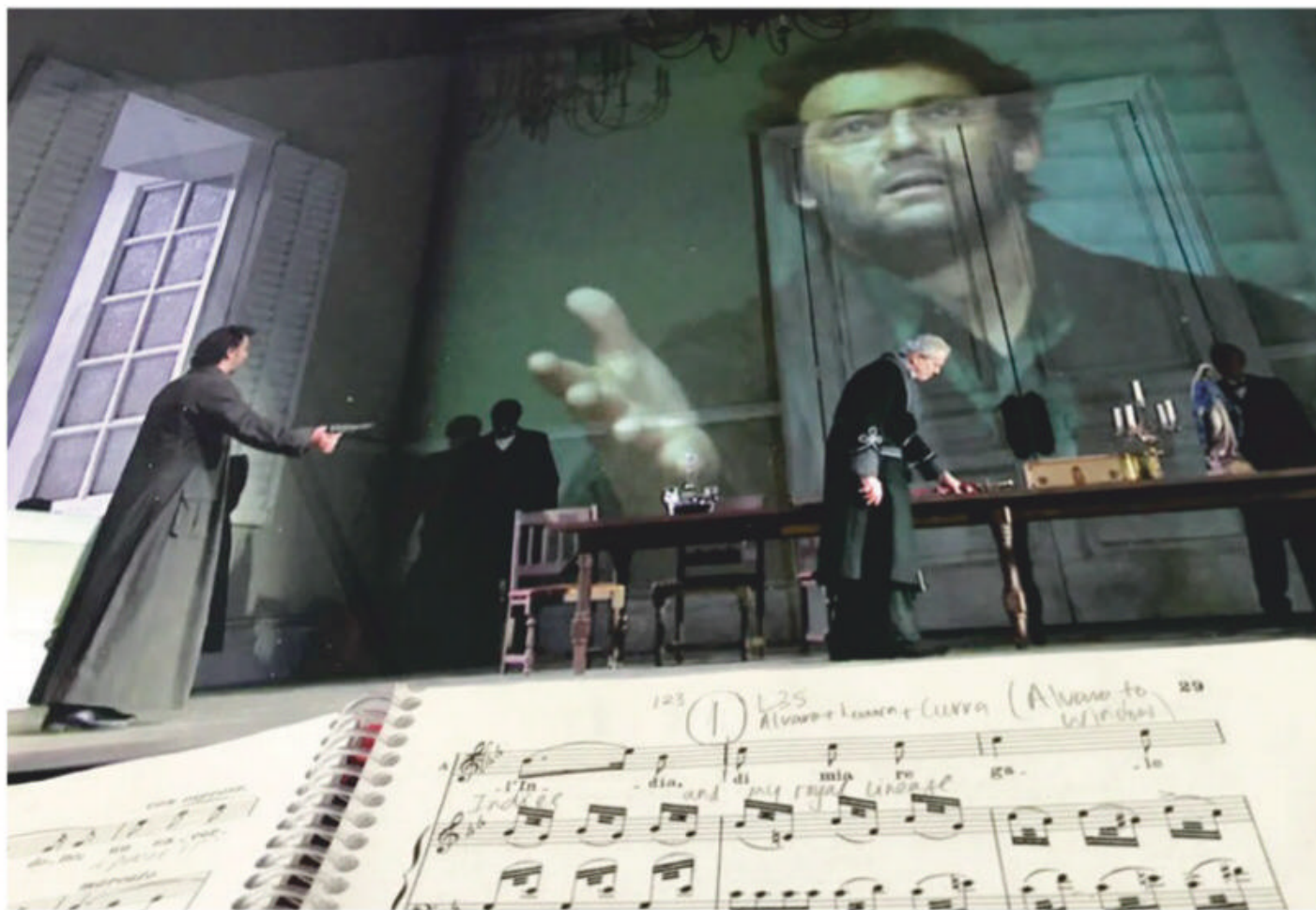
only the 2018 *Walküre* has been commercially released), he was always, says Ashman, ‘talking to her about the scenes she had worked on. It was unusual for her to be consulted in this way. But,’ he continues, ‘I know Jonathan was involved in every aspect of the production. He understood what the aim was and followed that through.’ Ashman even believes that Haswell made improvements: ‘In *Walküre*, it’s a hard space to grasp, and Jonathan managed to solved that – he’s so clear about the line, where the audience should be looking.’

This link between the two teams has only been strengthened by in-house filming which, from the 1970s, has increasingly become the norm for opera houses. Nowadays, early rehearsal footage is quickly made available to the filming team, which can help hugely with its understanding of a production. ‘This blueprint is a valuable reference tool,’ says Ashman. Rhodri Huw, a freelance screen director who has worked on ROH productions such as Richard Jones’s *La bohème* in 2017 for cinema and DVD/Blu-ray and Christof Loy’s *La forza del destino* with Anna Netrebko and Jonas Kaufmann which screened to cinemas last year, agrees: ‘The whole pace has changed. There’ll be a rehearsal on stage in the morning and we can access the footage that afternoon.’

Building a picture of the production through internal films, meetings with the director and attending rehearsals is vital at the ROH where the process is so complex. In addition to the stage director, there’ll be input from the conductor, language coach, choreographer, subtitle/surtitle team, lighting team and sound team. The latter, led by Jonathan Allen (who works closely with the conductor and the screen director), is responsible for the radio microphones and their transmitters, which need to be hidden into singers’ costumes, and for positioning the stage and orchestra microphones out of sight.

One of Huw’s first tasks is to create a camera script from the vocal score, adding his own word-for-word translation. From this, the script supervisor will create a shot list for the seven or eight camera operators, each shot description encompassing which characters to follow, how wide or tight to go, and any other details of the set or background to feature in the frame. But while some of the cameras are remote-controlled, most of them will be operated manually because, unlike orchestral concerts where players remain seated, filming opera involves following singers as they move across the stage. The vision mixer works slightly differently, too. ‘In concerts you’ll mostly cut to the music exactly,’ says Huw. ‘With opera, obviously it’s still very musically cut, but there’s the addition of balancing that with the action. The singers must be able to act spontaneously, and the vision mixer needs to be able to react to that.’

The video team works to a strict schedule. Huw will be given a wide-shot film of the dress rehearsal, which he’ll look at with the vision mixer, script supervisor and camera operators (whose creative input is encouraged) to map out each shot ahead of the



Filming Forza with Kaufmann for the ROH's cinema season: Huw's marked-up score lies in front of one of the camera screens

first filmed performance that same evening. At the end of the night, they'll have their first 'live cut', plus a low-resolution, multi-view recording: footage of what all the cameras are doing at all times, which enables Huw to tweak the script. He'll have also recorded, in a usable format, the whole output from several predesignated cameras as a back-up for any post-produced editing. Along with the production team, he'll then watch the live cut, at which point small changes relating to hair, make-up, lighting and staging may be suggested. And then it's all systems go for the next performance, which is filmed and broadcast live.

‘Cameras allow you to maximise the scale of an opera but also to capture incredible intimacy’ – Rhodri Huw, ROH screen director

With each broadcast reaching more than 1000 cinemas internationally, Huw admits that how a film will look on the big screen – as well as the fact that it's being filmed in 4K – has impacted his approach. ‘The scale is so big that you don't need a close-up of a singer singing flat out,’ he says. But he's enthusiastic about the camera's ability to juxtapose scale with intimacy: ‘You can maximise a production's scale by looking down from a height or with a wide angle from low and close to the stage, but equally you can get right into the middle of a scene,’ he says. Perhaps, though, his most compelling argument supports Ashman's comment about the film director expanding the work of the stage director – much in the same way as a concert film director can bring to the fore the composer's intentions in a symphony or concerto. ‘It's about pinning down the moments which help define the narrative. You don't necessarily need to be on a singer for every line – sometimes, focusing on the reactions of the chorus can give you colour and drive the storyline. Then again, if an incredible singer like Anna or Jonas has something important to say, you'll stay with them because they can transport you to another world.’

DCH - digitalconcerthall.com; GSOPlay - gso.se/gsoeplay; ROH: roh.org.uk/cinemas

Boost your sound to bring the concert hall home

With the boom in online concerts, recitals and theatre, TVs and computers are assuming increasing importance. But does your sound match the vision? **Andrew Everard** offers advice

Modern televisions make streaming live events simple: just about every set on the market these days is a 'smart' one, connected to a home internet service using either Ethernet or Wi-Fi, and so can access online streaming services either using a dedicated app or – in the case of services for which no app is available – via the integrated web browser the TV provides. Yes, entering long URLs can be a bit of a faff with some of these sets, requiring multiple key-presses to enter the letters one by one, but if you're going to be doing a lot of browsing on your TV, many sets can be used with a Bluetooth keyboard to simplify matters. Having a quick web search just now, I found at least one suitable model listed at just under £20 (and at the time of writing selling for half that), which would certainly make typing into the TV a much simpler matter.

And if your TV doesn't offer such connectivity, all isn't lost: it's possible to connect most modern computers to the screen using an HDMI cable, just as one would a disc player or a digital set-top box: the TV then becomes the display for the computer, and whatever you see on the computer's screen can also be viewed on the bigger display.

If the TV and the computer aren't close together, that's still not a problem: you can buy a 5m HDMI cable, or even a 10m example, for less than £20: even in quite large rooms that will allow you to choose your streamed event on a laptop, and then send it to your TV.

Or, if you want to take the wireless approach, you can even share the screen of your computer, tablet or even phone with your TV over your home Wi-Fi network using devices such as the Apple TV box, or Google's Chromecast. They're a cost-effective way to update an older TV set – one with limited or no 'smart' features – and bring it into the streaming video world.

And while you're setting all this up, it might be worth checking out the service you're getting from your internet service

provider (ISP), and tidying up your Wi-Fi network, too. Yes, most streaming services have been rapidly reconfigured to take up less bandwidth than before, acknowledging the pressure on networks created by many more people working from home – and spending a lot of time watching and listening to streaming services when they should be working! – but if you're on a budget internet plan, or have several people in the same household wanting to stream different content at the same time, it may well be worth enquiring about upping the speed of your service if possible.

For example, where available, upgrading from a basic 108Mbps Virginmedia service to one twice as fast will only add £14 to the monthly bill, while switching from BT's 36Mb Fibre Essential service to Fibre 2, which has almost twice the capacity at 67Mb, will cost you an extra £12. All the ISPs have similar deals, so it's worth trying one of the popular price comparison sites to see what's available.

Similarly, it's worth taking a close look at your home Wi-Fi network, especially if you have multiple wireless devices in your home accessing it, it's surrounded by neighbours' networks (which can cause interference, slowing speeds) or the room in which you wish to stream is physically distant from the location of the hub/router provided by your ISP. If I look on my phone as I write this, there are eight Wi-Fi networks available in addition to my own, and in densely populated urban environments there may be even more, so keeping one's own Wi-Fi strong is worthwhile to resist these 'invaders'.

The ability to have internet access everywhere in the home may still seem like a miracle to many, but the truth is that Wi-Fi works best in free space, and doesn't like walls too much, let alone ceilings. The solution is to consider a better – more powerful – router than that supplied by your service provider, and use that to form your wireless network, perhaps with the assistance of some repeater devices – which receive the Wi-

Fi signal, then amplify and re-broadcast it – to help achieve a stronger signal in the further reaches of the home.

BT, for example, will supply its customers with up to three 'Wi-Fi discs' – range extenders – to go with its Smart Hub 2 as part of its promise of providing wireless networking to every room in the home, but there's no shortage of third-party devices available to improve and boost the signal. In my relatively compact home, I use an Apple Airport Extreme as my main Wi-Fi router, from which are slaved two Airport Express units – one at the other end of the ground floor, the other upstairs – to boost signal strength. Meanwhile in a friend's home where I was asked to troubleshoot a weak network, I used a combination of a Netgear Nighthawk router and a couple of plug-in range extenders from the same brand. In each case, the Wi-Fi in the ISP's 'hub' – in both systems from Virginmedia, coincidentally – was turned off, leaving them functioning purely as modems connected to the router.

So you've boosted your network and connected your TV – I'll come to improving the experience on a computer a little later – and, once you've accessed the event you want, and settled down in front of your huge flatscreen TV, you may find that the sound on offer comes as something of a disappointment.

Yes, the sound quality of these ultra-slim sets has improved hugely since they first appeared, with a lot of development going into the seemingly irreconcilable requirements of keeping the TV as slender as possible while finding space to fit in decent speakers and providing them with enclosures in which to work. For those used to hearing their music on a high-quality hi-fi system, however, even the best-sounding current TVs can be something of a disappointment.

A TV mere centimetres thick, however clever the engineering and digital signal processing employed, is probably the worst possible environment in which to try to house speakers and high-quality

amplification, especially when it comes to delivering sound of decent scale and detail. As generations of hi-fi speakers have proved, there's no substitute for shifting plenty of air when it comes to a full-rich bass.

However, help is at hand: just as some TV manufacturers have turned to established loudspeaker companies in the search for sonic solutions – for example, some upmarket Philips TVs draw on the experience of Bowers & Wilkins – so it's possible to improve on the sound of your TV by handing the audio side of things over to the experts in the field. Just about every modern TV has a sound output, whether on an optical digital socket, via the HDMI ports you use to connect the likes of Sky and Virgin boxes or (admittedly less common these days) a pair of analogue audio outputs.

To one of these options you can connect a sound system, whether it's your main hi-fi set-up – usually via a digital-to-analogue converter with an optical input or (in a few cases) HDMI capability; using a dedicated home cinema receiver via HDMI, which will also open up the possibility of full surround sound; or the simplest way, which is to use a 'soundbar' designed to sit below your TV on a stand or wall-mount above or below it.

Like TVs, soundbars have come on a long way since the earliest models, and you can buy them with wireless subwoofers, multiple drive units and digital processing to create (in some cases) credible surround effects, and even voice control for wireless music streaming from online audio services. TV connection is either via that optical connection or, in more expensive models, using HDMI making use of the Audio Return Channel (ARC) part of the HDMI specification now pretty much standard on TVs.

ARC allows sound to be passed back through the cable to suitable audio devices, such as soundbars and AV receivers, and is usually partnered with HDMI-CEC (for Consumer Electronics Control), allowing HDMI-connected devices to be controlled by a single remote handset.

Slimline soundbars start from as little as £100 or so, for a compact model best used with what these days are considered as smaller screen sizes (42in or smaller), while further upmarket are more complex models designed to give not only a big, rich sound but a fully enveloping surround soundfield. One of the earliest exponents of this 'surround from a single source' trend was Yamaha, and its current line-up shows the benefit of all


that experience: its YSP- range of Digital Sound Projectors uses complex digital processing and multiple drive units to deliver not just a wraparound soundfield, but also one with the 'height channels' required for the latest '3D audio' formats, Dolby Atmos and DTS:X.

I can't promise even these speakers will bring you that rustle of a programme or irritating cough from three rows back, but combining a high-quality TV with an impressive sound system will create a truly immersive concert experience.

Even if you're only going to watch your streaming concerts on a computer, you don't have to settle for second-rate sound and vision. As I'm typing this I have before me a Mac mini computer running into a 28in 4K-capable Samsung monitor and a compact sound system, which is my desktop set-up, and it makes for a very compelling viewing experience with the many events on offer from a variety of musicians and organisations. But you don't have to go that far: it's easy to improve the sound of laptops, tablets and even phones with an affordable add-on digital-to-analogue converter and a pair of headphones. Such a set-up also has the advantage of portability for streaming wherever you are – assuming we're actually allowed to go anywhere by the time you read this!

I've suggested some suitable DAC/headphone amplifiers in the sidebar to this piece – though of course you could simply use a pair of Bluetooth headphones – but in every case the principle is the same: yes, your device may have a headphone output, but in most cases the electronics feeding it won't be very good, so we're adding better digital-to-analogue conversion and amplification, better able to drive a range of headphones.

The good news is that many of these add-on DAC/amplifiers are compact – some are no bigger than a USB memory device, and others offer even better performance in a very pocketable form – and affordable. In many cases they use the same digital conversion technology you'll find in very expensive high-end hi-fi separates, and all of them are just about 'plug and play' – and as well as being perfect for watching online video streams, they're also exceptionally good at playing audio-only content, too.

And of course they have the distinct advantage that, using one of them with a pair of headphones, you cannot only have concerts, recitals and the rest streamed into your home, you can also make it truly personal – whatever else is going on around you. 

Improve your TV sound

Cyrus ONE Cast

The compact Cyrus amplifier is both high-quality hi-fi and a streaming solution, with built-in Google Cast wireless connectivity. It also has an HDMI input to take the sound from a TV – just add speakers for a complete high-quality sound system.



Denon DHT-216

Slender enough to sit under the front of almost any TV, or mount on the wall – it's only 6cm tall – the Denon soundbar uses clever signal processing to create the impression of sound all around the room, for a truly immersive experience.



Yamaha Sound Projectors

Not the most affordable on the market, but these are no ordinary soundbars. Using multiple drive units and the company's own digital signal processing, these models can create a very credible surround-sound effect from a single enclosure – some even have the ability to create 3D height effects with Dolby Atmos movies.



DACs for a computer

Audiolab M-DAC Mini

Using the technology of Audiolab's full-size digital-to-analogue converters, this compact unit sits between the ultra-portable DAC offerings and high-end hi-fi models. It's an excellent headphone amplifier, too, and very simple to use.



Audioquest DragonFly Black

The latest version of Audioquest's original DragonFly design, and the company's most affordable model, this is still a powerful DAC-in-a-stick, and exceptionally portable. It's powered from the computer and can either power headphones or connect to a hi-fi system.



iFi Audio hipDAC

This British-based company makes innovative products, both analogue and digital, with fine-sounding designs. Don't be fooled by the playful 'hip-flask' design: this is an excellent DAC/headphone amp, powered by its internal rechargeable battery.



Touching the DIVINE

He may have been less adventurous than Brahms but Bruch had a remarkable ear for melody, and in his late works he captured a profound level of expression, writes **Andrew Mellor** as we approach the centenary of the composer's death

Max Bruch was born into a German music scene dominated by Mendelssohn and died a century ago within a decade of the first performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. His lifetime straddled seismic shifts in music's language, its frame of reference and its place in society. Not that it bothered Bruch too much. Once established, the composer's lyrical Romantic style would hardly change. On paper, much of the music he wrote in the last decade of his life resembled what he had produced 60 years earlier. Groundbreaking it was not.

Was Bruch born too late? Hardly. Brahms was positively expressionistic in comparison, while sticking to many of the same aesthetic ideals as his junior by five years. Bruch, in contrast, was change-resistant, full of noise about what he *didn't* like, and as the straight-talking folk of Liverpool discovered, he was frequently cantankerous. That which established him as a composer is that which sustains his reputation today: his love for melody, his openness to it and his ability to conjure it up. Bruch's cleaving to melody as both source and structure kept his ears alive to the truly beautiful, whatever its provenance.

Unlike Brahms, Bruch was commercially successful and critically maligned precisely because he played it safe

On November 4, 1857, the composer bade farewell to his home town of Cologne with a concert there which included his Op 5 Piano Trio and the cantata *Die Birken und die Erlen*, Op 8 (for soprano, chorus and orchestra but on this occasion performed with voices and piano alone). Bruch wrote angrily about the 'dull rattle-trap' of the piano, a phrase that would foreshadow his famous remark, 'The violin can sing a melody better than the piano can.' Bruch, in fact, loathed the piano. A brief encounter with the charmless Op 88a Concerto for two pianos (which he refashioned from an organ suite) will readily prove it.

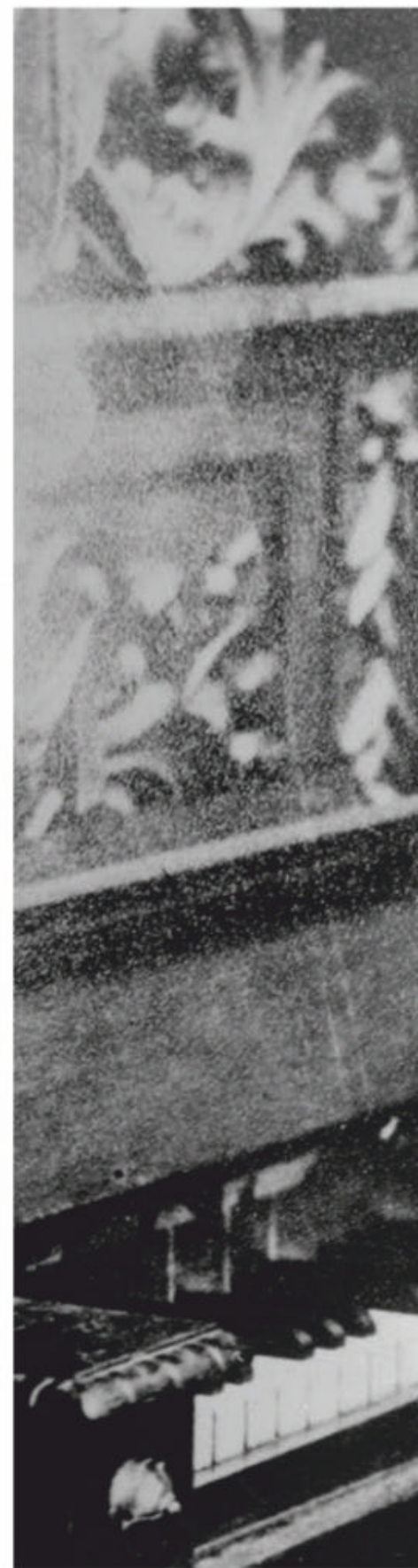
For now, Bruch was on the way to Leipzig and the conservatory made famous by Mendelssohn, whose musical spirit still dominated the institution. He threw himself into Leipzig's musical life and devoured performances of Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn and Schumann at the Gewandhaus.

Already, melody was tugging at Bruch in a city ruled by the Mendelssohn school's emphasis on post-Classical thematic augmentation (which would lead so many composers into a cul-de-sac of pedantic, empty music) and apparently bereft of singers. Bruch wrote to his former teacher in Cologne, Ferdinand Hiller, expressing disappointment that singing was not held in as high esteem in Saxony as it was in the Rhineland.

One reason for Bruch's impatience was *Die Birken und die Erlen's* readiness for performance. Bruch would make his reputation with secular cantatas like this one. After Leipzig, the composer settled in Mannheim and wrote the cantata *Frithjof* (1864). According to the composer's biographer Christopher Fifield, this work kept his name before the German public throughout his life. It is based on an Icelandic saga and scored for two soloists, male choir and orchestra. It proved a hit in Leipzig and was conducted by Bruch in Vienna. 'What I merely sensed in *Die Loreley*, I expressed clearly in *Frithjof*,' the composer wrote in 1865, referring to the big-boned, stodgy opera he had completed in 1863, a piece that exposes the young composer's shortcomings in the domain of theatrical music (it was issued in a recording last year, 3/19).

Heard via YouTube (where the only recording resides these days, courtesy of the Dutch Limburg Symphony Orchestra and Theo Timp), *Frithjof* certainly appears to possess a degree more charm and fluency than its operatic contemporary. For Bruch, it formed a prelude to the series of cantatas that would secure him, among other things, the principal conductorship of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society (1880-83). He was offered that job on the strength of his own performances on Merseyside of his *Odysseus*, Op 41, and *Das Lied von der Glocke*, Op 45.

As Europe moved towards the First World War, Bruch's cantatas increased in domestic popularity but disappeared outside Germany. *Das Lied von der Glocke* (1878) is full of curvaceous vocal writing and earnest, beauteous music but can lack the last degree of spirit and atmosphere. *Odysseus* (1872)





Bruch pictured working at the piano, an instrument he loathed, with its 'dull rattle-trap'; as he famously remarked, 'The violin can sing a melody better than the piano can'

was Bruch's most successful work in his lifetime and goes some way towards redressing those deficiencies. Brahms chose to conduct the piece in 1875 to mark the end of his conducting tenure in Vienna. In the 1930s, Sir Donald Francis Tovey rated it as Bruch's finest: 'I have not the slightest doubt that a revival [...] would make a fresh and stirring impression on any audience that will listen,' he wrote. No recording currently exists in the catalogue, but CPO – which (in collaboration with German broadcasters) seems determined to get through something like a 'complete works' – may well arrive at it soon.

Bruch knew that Brahms was the more adventurous composer – that the chief differential between the two was that his elder 'took risks'. Bruch, it seems, felt a familial responsibility to follow the money. He was commercially successful and critically maligned precisely because he played it safe. He wasted no time striking up a relationship with Breitkopf when he arrived in Leipzig, but the inexperienced Bruch proved his insufficient business nous when he later came to agree terms

with August Cranz for the publication (in 1868) of his Violin Concerto No 1. He readily signed away the royalty rights to his most enduring work and came bitterly to regret it.

Nine more *concertante* scores for violin and orchestra would follow, bringing with them the perennial question of why the Second and Third Concertos have never enjoyed the popularity of the First. The simple answer is in the listening. Concerto No 1 is pure inspiration to its successors' apparent perspiration, even if the reality of their composition was wholly different. Bruch worked tirelessly writing and rewriting the First Concerto to get it to the point where Joseph Joachim could describe it as 'the richest, most seductive' written by a German. In the same breath, Joachim described Brahms's concerto as the most serious – even more so than Bruch's No 2 (1877), that is, which it followed by a year (dedicated to Joachim, while Bruch's score was written for Pablo de Sarasate) and from which it stole quite some attention.

Yes, Bruch's Concerto No 2 can feel a little congested against the Brahms: a complex stage play next to a sweeping

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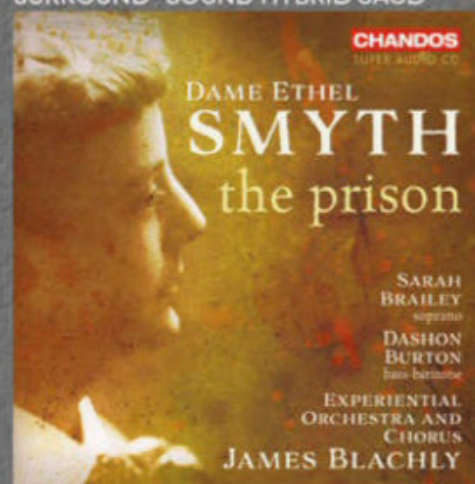


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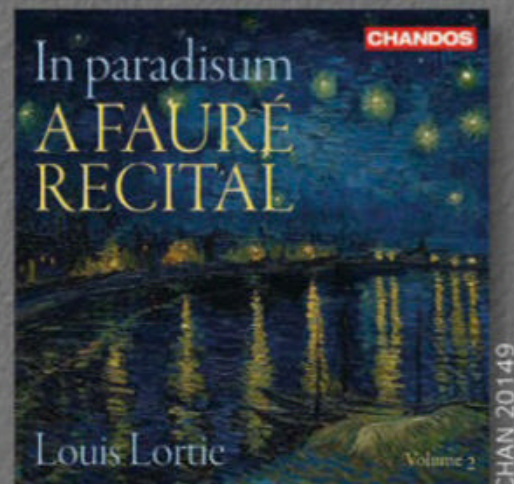


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Great players with whom Bruch's violin concertos were associated: Joachim, who was closely involved in the creation of Nos 1 and 3, and Sarasate, to whom No 2 was dedicated

monologue. But there are special moments in Bruch's score, not least in the slow movement where the orchestral interludes range from the hushed to the climactic. Joachim commissioned Bruch's Third (1891), written to an uppity classical design that prompted the composer to recall the distilled textures of the First Concerto (particularly in the slow movement) while reminding us that long-breathed lyricism is what Bruch does best.

The composer consciously sought the inspiration of folk tunes for his three violin concertos. In cases where he relaxed into that process and came clean about the provenance of his works in their titles, the results seem to be so much more refreshing for both performer and listener. As witness the soulful prayer for cello and orchestra *Kol nidrei* (Bruch encountered the traditional liturgical theme while conducting a Jewish choir in Berlin) and the *Scottish Fantasy*. The latter communicates its Sir Walter Scott-derived narrative with supreme ease courtesy of authentic melodies deftly handled. Bruch would return to folk song for his *Serenade on Swedish Melodies*, which arrived in 1916, almost half a century after the Violin Concerto No 1, at a time when old age had moved the composer towards a distillation of means and method. In getting out of the way of his chosen tunes, he did them a service.

Posterity has served the three violin concertos pretty fairly. Bruch the symphonist, however, could well use the attention of revisionism's spotlight. The three symphonies were written between 1867 and 1883, the last as the composer departed Liverpool after a few professionally strained but personally fulfilled years (he married during his tenure and his daughter was born in the city). The stern Leipzig rule book hangs heavy over the hard-working First Symphony, before a greater degree

'You must dig into the scores of Symphonies Nos 2 and 3 to find the lines, the melody, the subtleties of scoring' – Robert Trevino

of emotional flexibility emerges in the Second, which followed in 1870 and breathes easier, also demonstrating a more interesting handling of material. 'Symphony No 2 enters Brahms 3 territory with these more opaque lines and all this ambiguity,' says Robert Trevino, whose recordings of the

complete symphonies with the Bamberg Symphony were issued by CPO in May.

The Third, based on material from far earlier in Bruch's career, seems to pine for the composer's native

Rhineland behind its slight stiffness – a mark, perhaps, of how far from home he felt working in Liverpool and writing for New York, while already contracted to begin a conducting job in Breslau (as far as you can get from the Rhine while remaining in Germany). Parallels with the processional from Schumann's

own *Rhenish* Symphony are hard to avoid in the *Adagio*, which feels solemn to the point of sacred. Trevino extends the comparison to performance practice: 'When you don't bring the necessary nuance of approach to Schumann, his music is easily dismissible as poorly orchestrated. In reality you need to temper it all the time. And I really feel that when you get into Bruch's Second and Third symphonies you have to dig into the scores to find where the lines are, where the melody is and what the subtleties of the scoring are. It's about flexibility.'

Trevino, who feels much the same about the overperformed Violin Concerto No 1 (his recording with Ray Chen was issued two years ago, 9/18), summarises Bruch's output as 'beautiful, wholesome German lyrical music that didn't break any moulds'. Yes, it can often lack that vital, indescribably extra dimension. But not always. Something happened to Bruch's expression in the last years of his life, when his stubborn determination to resist the developments of Wagner and



Brahms: a Bruch contemporary, but more of a risk-taker



A sense of melancholy-tinged nostalgia is keenly felt in Bruch's late works

Liszt morphed into a form of liberating resignation – the conclusion that he no longer had a point to prove. A series of works written as the composer retired from his professorship at Berlin's Hochschule für Musik saw him relaxing into a new, more profound level of expression.

A catalyst was Bruch's son Max Felix, a clarinettist who had progressed to competence and then excellence on the instrument. As Brahms had done two decades before him, Bruch became deeply interested in the sonority of the clarinet. In 1910, he wrote his Eight Pieces, Op 83, for clarinet, viola and piano for his son to play with two colleagues. 'There is a carefree feeling to these pieces,' says the clarinettist Robert Plane, who recorded the set for ASV in 2001; 'some of them are in the minor key; you'd expect them to feel darker than they do but somehow the richness of colour makes them feel warm, even when they're actually quite tragic. It's like he's finally thrown off some worries and just decided to do what he does best: write amazing melodies.'

The works are charming lyrical miniatures, each of a distinct mood but the whole set united by the sort of mellow richness that comes so naturally to the combination of viola and clarinet; Plane describes it as 'a lovely blanket of sound'. Something in that combination evidently got under Bruch's skin: in 1911, he followed the Eight Pieces with a 'Double' Concerto, Op 88, for clarinet, viola and orchestra which remains the composer's best-kept secret. Gone is the virtuosity that characterised the early violin concertos. In its place is a reflective stillness, a depth of expression that renders every note meaningful and is underlined by a semblance of the autumnal. The two solo


instruments trade in deep brown colours, even in the restrained caprice of the concerto's finale.

Brahms lambasted Bruch for opening the second of his violin concertos with a slow movement, claiming it turned audiences off. In the Double Concerto, Bruch shows how little he cared. After a short cadenza-like recitative for both soloists, one of the

'You have to have the patience and courage to trust those melodies, make them really long and keep the tempo slow' – Robert Plane

composer's most beautiful melodies unfurls at a languorously low speed, the solo instruments entwining themselves around one another. 'You have to have the patience and courage to trust those melodies, make them really long and keep the tempo slow,' says Plane. The instrument combination has precedents in Mozart, Schumann and even in Brahms. Plane acknowledges that the partnership of clarinet and viola has 'an intrigue, and is amazingly rich and satisfying'.

It is odd indeed to consider this work of glowing, Romantic consolation as coming just months before Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. But Bruch was not done with his late flowering, or its distinctive expression: 1918 and the desolate aftermath of the First World War brought forth his most celebrated chamber works, including the two string quintets in which the sense of melancholy-tinged nostalgia is felt even more. Again, his music has slowed; there are effectively four slow movements between these two works, with blissfully melodic music at every turn, as realised by the *Gramophone* Award-nominated 2016 recording from the Nash Ensemble. 'What we have here is probably Bruch's finest string chamber work,' suggests Richard Bratby in his review (5/17).

A year after he'd written the quintets, Bruch's wife, Clara Tucek, died. The composer followed her in 1920. His epitaph would read 'Music is the Language of God'. Does his work get close to the divine? Yes, and more often than we think. 

MUST-HEAR BRUCH

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Bruch relishes the combination of clarinet and viola here.



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A *Gramophone* Award-nominated recording of Bruch's chamber music from the aftermath of the First World War.



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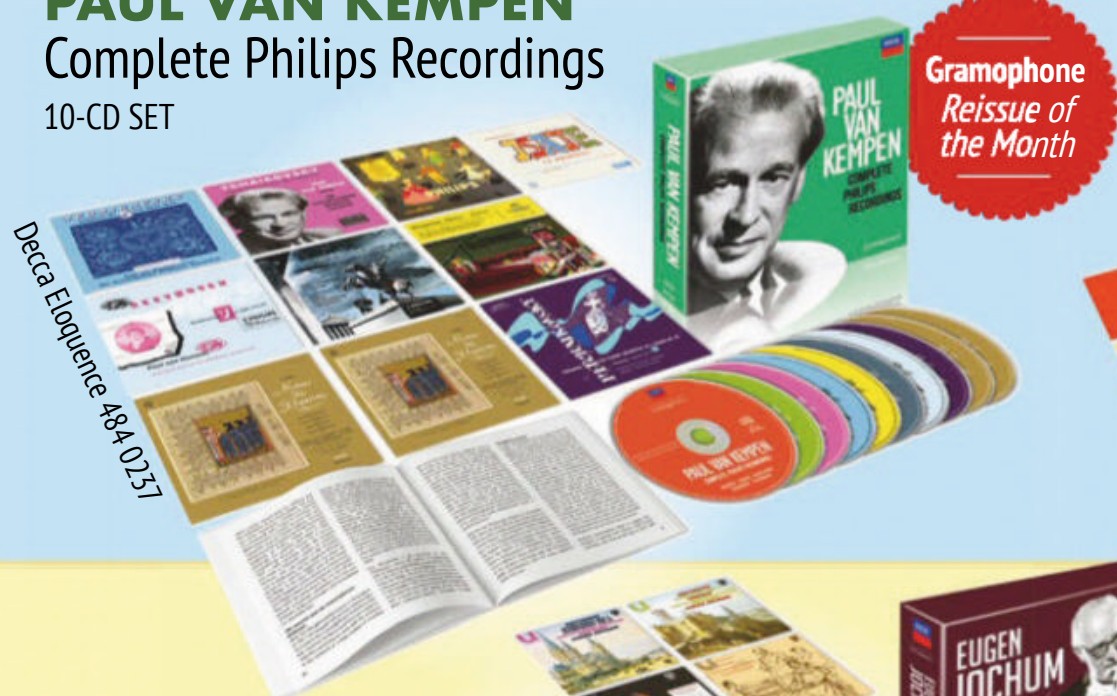
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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Tim Ashley welcomes a triumphant recording from Gianandrea Nosedà, a seasoned champion of Dallapiccola's music, of this composer's most important opera



Dallapiccola

Il prigioniero^a. Estate. Prima serie dei Cori di Michelangelo Buonarroti il Giovane

^aAnna Maria Chiuri *mez*.....Mother

^aMichael Nagy *bar*.....Prisoner

^aStephan Rügamer *ten*.....Jailer/Grand Inquisitor

^aAdam Riis *ten*.....First Priest

^aSteffen Bruun *bass*.....Second Priest

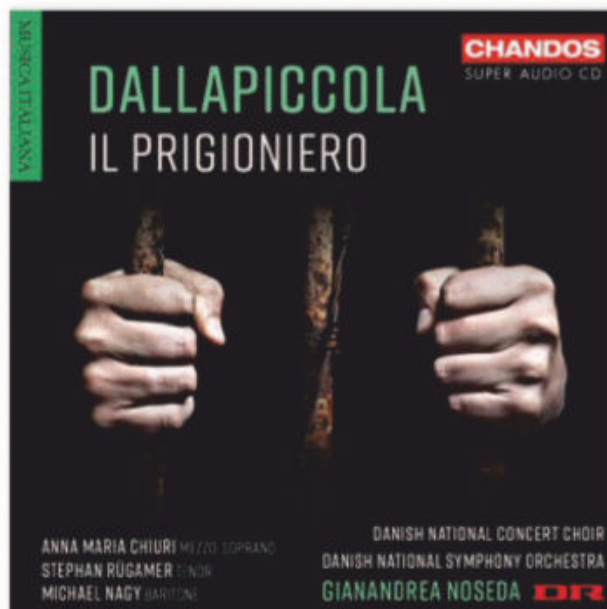
Danish National Concert Choir and ^aSymphony Orchestra / Gianandrea Nosedà

Chandos © CHSA5276 (56' • DDD/DSD)

Includes synopsis, libretto, texts and translation

Gianandrea Nosedà's powerhouse recording of *Il prigioniero* marks his return to Dallapiccola's music after a gap of 10 years. An assiduous champion of the composer's work, Nosedà embarked on a survey of his orchestral output with the BBC Philharmonic in the wake of the centenary of Dallapiccola's birth in 2004, reintroducing much that we encounter infrequently in the concert hall, as well as unearthing genuine rarities: his 2009 Bridgewater Hall performance of the ballet *Marsia* – its first complete outing anywhere since 1948 – lingers in the memory as an important rediscovery of a much neglected score.

Two superb Dallapiccola discs with the BBC Philharmonic (12/04 and 5/10) also formed part of his exploration of the 20th-century Italian repertory for Chandos, begun some 15 years ago and eventually involving an impressive roster of orchestras including the Danish National Symphony, which he conducts here. Those albums' admirers have, I suspect, been hankering for some time to hear him conduct this



'The impact derives from Nosedà's ability to think in terms of cumulative span while focusing on immediacy of expression'

shattering protest opera, Dallapiccola's most familiar work, begun in 1944 when he was in hiding from the fascist authorities, completed in 1948 and premiered, originally by Italian radio, the following year. If so, it has been well worth the wait: this is both a significant

achievement and a major addition to the composer's discography.

One of the great works of witness to the catastrophes of the mid-20th century, *Il prigioniero* is set in Spain during the reign of Philip II – 'the Owl, the son of the Vulture', as Dallapiccola's own libretto describes him – and takes the Spanish oppression of Protestantism in the Low Countries as emblematic of persecution and genocide, past and present. An unnamed Prisoner, facing execution in a jail in Zaragoza, is permitted to escape by his Jailer only to realise, the moment he attains his freedom, that the Jailer is in fact the Grand Inquisitor in disguise, and that he has been subjected to a hideous game of psychological torture by being allowed to experience hope at the time of his greatest despair. The opera ends with the words 'la libertà?' posed as a question, as if the idea of human freedom were itself illusory. Dallapiccola later claimed that the rest of his output effectively constituted his own search for an answer.

Nosedà's performance is nothing if not formidable. Its impact derives largely from his ability to think in terms of cumulative

span while focusing on textural clarity and immediacy of expression, so that the horrifying momentum with which the narrative unfolds is heightened by the wealth of ambivalent detail uncovered during its course. The lurching opening chords immediately establish a palpable atmosphere of terror, while implacable ostinatos suggest in turn the pervasive influence of the unseen Philip and the tolling bells of Ghent that symbolise the revolutionary freedom for



Gianandrea Nosedà's *Il prigioniero* is a major addition to the Dallapiccola discography



Commitment and finesse: the Danish National Symphony Orchestra make an enormous contribution to the dramatic success of Dallapiccola's harrowing opera

which the Prisoner yearns. We're conscious throughout both of the work's taut, Bergian structure, with its set-piece forms – aria, ballata, *ricercare* – subsumed into a wider developmental flow, and the subtlety of its harmonic and melodic language, rooted in serialism yet at times veering towards the illusory safety of tonality.

Most telling, perhaps, is the way Nosedà underscores the insidious beauty of the passages in which the Prisoner is deceived into believing liberty to be within his grasp: the seductive strings and tuned percussion that accompany the Jailer/Inquisitor's intimations of hope; and the woodwind flurries as the Prisoner, emerging into the prison's garden, feels the freshness of the air on his skin. Nosedà is helped immeasurably throughout both by his Danish orchestra, who play with marvellous commitment and finesse, and by Chandos's immaculate recording, ideal in its clarity and balance, vastly preferable to the slightly muddy sound of its principal rival, Antal Dorati's Decca performance (5/75) with the National

Symphony Orchestra, Washington DC (of which Nosedà, ironically perhaps, is also now music director).

The cast, meanwhile, combine lyricism with declamation, reminding us that Dallapiccola's vocal writing, hovering between recitative and *arioso*, essentially takes his beloved Monteverdi as its starting point. Michael Nagy makes a fine, subtle Prisoner, taking us with him every step of the way on his harrowing emotional and intellectual journey. Anna Maria Chiuri is his anguished Mother, Stephan Rügamer the lethally dangerous Inquisitor, deploying a disquieting, honeyed *mezza voce* in moments of terrifying charm.

The Danish National Concert Choir sound tremendous, meanwhile, their opening 'Fiat misericordia tua, Domine' taking one's breath away as it breaks into Chiuri's opening monologue. They also provide the fillers – and indeed some much-needed emotional relief – with Dallapiccola's *a cappella* settings of rueful comments on marriage by Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger (the artist's great-

nephew) and the lovely *Estate*, to a text by the Greek poet Alcaeus. Overtly indebted to the Italian madrigal tradition, both works are ravishingly sung. It's an outstanding, essential album, every second of it. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



David Gutman hears some lesser-known Prokofiev ballet scores:

'The harmonic language is less predictable when the plot gives Prokofiev the excuse (or political cover) to try something new' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 39**



Christian Hoskins on a number of NHK Symphony releases:

'Paavo Järvi's reading of Mahler's Sixth Symphony is judiciously paced and superbly controlled' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**

Adès

In *Seven Days*^a. Berceuse from 'The Exterminating Angel'. Concert Paraphrase on 'Powder Her Face'^b. Mazurkas for Piano Kirill Gerstein *pf*^a **Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra / Thomas Adès** *bpf* Myrios © MYRO27 (59' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at Seiji Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood, Lenox, MA, July 30, 2018



In Seven Days is the serious piano-and-orchestra work to Adès's more display-

orientated Piano Concerto (DG, 5/20), in which sense it reflects well on both the composer and his favoured pianist to follow their Boston recording of the latter with this Tanglewood account of the former. It is, I would argue, Adès's masterpiece: the fullest expression to date of his schematic musical mind – its ability to transform, contemplate, expand and recontextualise a fertile idea before unwinding all that and taking you back to the start like a magician pulling the original card from the deck. The unflinching focus on the material draws Adès away from his gauche habit of musical name-dropping while freeing up space for mesmerising orchestration. The music's concurrent ability to evoke the seven chapters of creation – to 'expand and explode as if the genetic code of the universe were bursting out in music both organic and geometric' (Tom Service in the booklet) – is the layer that makes this the work of a genius.

Like *The Rite of Spring*, *In Seven Days* seems to have abandoned the non-musical material with which it was created. At the time of the first recording, that material – Tal Rosner's film – was part of the title. Not much separates the recordings, both conducted by Adès (though you get Rosner's moving images on the Signum release) other than Nicolas Hodges's more boxy-sounding piano and the London Sinfonietta's surer idea of itself as an ensemble. The Myrios recording can

sound muddy but it also reveals more texture in certain sections (notably string and brass). The 'Hollywood' moment in the first fugue – 'Creatures of the Sea and Sky' – is a little less garish and a bit more heartening on the newcomer, which is more or less the case across the board even if some might say the focus of the original recording suits the architecture better. Here Adès seems to recognise and relish the sense of strain he builds into the piece's development. In this piece, unlike the Concerto, he never takes the easy path.

The best among the piano-only works is the set of three Mazurkas, whose pre-ordained frameworks again prompt Adès to greater levels of invention. Like the wrenching half-passacaglia that is the Berceuse, the third of the Mazurkas slides hopelessly downwards; its distillation and white space play with the Chopin model but prove, as the concertante work does, how Adès's ability to place (or remove) a single note lines him up with Bach, Britten, Boulez, etc. The dirty cut glass and trolled waltzes of the *Powder Her Face* paraphrase are a typical Adès in-joke; I can take them or leave them (or better still, stick to the opera) but there's plenty more to get your teeth into here. **Andrew Mellor**

In Seven Days – comparative version:

Hodges, London Sinfonietta, Adès

(5/12) (SIGN) SIGCD277

Beethoven

Complete Symphonies

Kate Royal *sop* **Christine Rice** *mez* **Tuomas Katajala** *ten* **Derek Welton** *bass* **Malmö Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Robert Trevino**

Ondine © 5 ODE1348-5Q

(5h 5' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

Recorded live at Malmö Live Konserthus, Malmö, October 2019



Recorded live, it says on the back of the box, and you can tell: not by the concluding applause, which has presumably been

edited out, or by telltale slips – if there were any, they have been patched – but by the unpredictable loss of momentum here and there. Halfway through the *Pastoral*'s finale, for instance, and at the crucial transition points from slow introduction to *Allegro* in the opening movements of the Fourth and Seventh. Once lost, tension is not easily regained.

Now 35, Robert Trevino was taken under David Zinman's wing at Aspen a decade ago. He emulates the older man's Beethoven in ways both specific – the *Eroica* finale's second variation assigned to solo strings, and rather shakily so – and more general: the pointed voicing within and between parts, underlining the often fierce, sometimes playful argument which animates each work and so powerfully differentiates even the First from symphonic predecessors and contemporaries.

In other respects, Trevino goes his own way – backwards, you might say, in matters of tempo. The Seventh's finale is marginally quicker than the metronome marking but otherwise deviations tend in the other direction. Slow movements are inclined to drift; when taken fully 25 per cent slower than the indicated tempo, as in the Second's *Larghetto*, no wonder. A retro Eighth is set in motion with the broad, propulsive swing of a Beecham or Karajan in this music (basic tempo and timing both identical to the latter's 1961 recording) and in the hurly-burly at the *fff* climax, Trevino achieves a rare clarity of harmony and purpose, aided by Ondine's exceptionally transparent engineering, though he spoils the joke at the end of the movement by self-consciously placing the final chord.

In places such as the *Eroica*'s funeral march it is left to the Malmö winds to counter the impression of passivity, which they do with playing of considerable charm and personality. Less silky than their rivals in Gothenburg or nearby Copenhagen, the strings are stretched, under one-off concert conditions, to place every last chord and accent with the required unanimity in quick movements such as the Fourth's Scherzo

(again compromised by an artful holding back just before the last chord).

Many otherwise admirable cycles come a cropper in the Ninth – Mackerras (Hyperion, A/07) a case in point, replacing the SCO with the Philharmonia – and it seems somehow fitting that the symphony brings out the best in Trevino. Driving forwards the first movement without looking left or right, he draws it back within the ambit of Nos 1-8 without compromising its scale or the impact of its central crisis. Beethoven's orchestral writing had become more massive, perhaps even unwieldy during the intervening decade – see also the *Missa solemnis* – but Trevino retains the kind of rhythmic spring and lucidity proper to Haydn's 'London' Symphonies. I also like the rustic energy of the Scherzo – proto-Brucknerian in the best way – and the pointing of the B section's timpani tattoo, subtly different each time. But the slow movement is too placid by half, and Ondine's engineering finally falls short in the finale, where the 75-strong chorus is too backwardly placed and the soloists insufficiently spotlighted to contribute much more than a general impression of accomplished rejoicing and rather less than a cosmic hymn: the notoriously exigent 'Über Sternen' (16'40" onwards) is exquisitely under the note.

For a representative sample, try the Fifth, charged with more urgency and jeopardy from the off than Nelsons in Vienna (DG, 11/19), but a minute or two spent listening to Currentzis (Sony, 4/20), Janowski (Pentatone, 1/20) or Manze (Pentatone, 3/20) – to pick only from other Fifts released within the year – should tell you what's missing here. **Peter Quanttrill**

Bruch

'Complete Symphonies'

Symphonies – No 1, Op 28; No 2, Op 36; No 3, Op 51. Hermione – Prelude; Funeral March; Entr'acte. Loreley – Overture. Odysseus, Op 41 – Prelude

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Robert Trevino
CPO ② CPO555 252-2 (149' • DDD)



Poor old Max Bruch: a composer born to spin long lyrical melodies in a culture

that demanded that its symphonists be Beethovenian supermen, and whose prickly, defensive personality masked the most tender of Romantic souls. In truth, Bruch's three symphonies are a gift to a sympathetic interpreter, and Robert Trevino joins a select group of conductors



Favoured collaboration: Thomas Adès and Kirill Gerstein continue their fruitful partnership

(including Kurt Masur and Richard Hickox) who have succeeded in making these awkward but intensely lovable works sing.

Trevino has gone a step further, too: reinstating the discarded second-movement Intermezzo of the First Symphony and giving this a claim to be the most complete Bruch cycle currently available. But the main selling-point here is the playing of the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra; a real asset in music that needs to glow from within. Bruch was a Rhinelander, and for all his slightly resentful hero-worship of Brahms (the First is dedicated to him and the finale of the Second opens with a melody that prefigures – and pre-dates – the equivalent theme in Brahms's First) we're a long way from Brahms's windswept heaths.

This is music of rolling vistas, sunlit hillsides and good wine, and the sound of the Bambergers suits it beautifully. The strings have a satin sheen (for silk you'll need to go to Masur and the Gewandhaus, still the benchmark in these works) and the all-important inner-voice blend of cellos, clarinets and horns gives the overall tone quality an unforced radiance. Trevino caresses those inner voices, shaping phrases with feeling but generally finding the right moment to pick up the tempo and start tightening the argument.

Sonata movements have room to bask in the sunshine but they never snooze. The horns are positively august in the Third Symphony, and while Trevino's expansive reading really catches the sweep of the

stormy, long-breathed Second, there's an unforced freshness at the moments where Bruch lets birdsong flood in – passages ideally suited to the Bambergers' lively but unaffected woodwind-playing. The same qualities – pace, colour and a general sense of being inside the composer's style – are present in the collection of overtures and preludes that completes the second disc; music so appealing that it makes even CPO's rambling booklet notes feel charming rather than inept. **Richard Bratby**

Symphonies – selected comparisons:

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Masur

(10/84^R, 3/89^R) (DECC) 462 164-2DM2

Debussy

Images. Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut (orch C Matthews). **La plus que lente.**

Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune

Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder

Hallé © CDHLL7554 (61' • DDD)



'Well written, but with that skill born of habit that one has so much difficulty

conquering and which is so tedious', Debussy wrote to his publisher in 1907, in a moment of self-doubt, of the work that eventually became *Images*. No one, I suspect, would nowadays agree that his orchestral triptych was the product of 'habit', but in many ways it was to be his problem piece, occupying him on and off for a total of seven years between 1905 and 1912. The jury is still out among Debussy scholars as to whether André Caplet had a hand in the orchestration of 'Gigues', which gave Debussy more trouble than the rest of it, and some have argued that as a set it lacks natural unity, a charge that Mark Elder's excellent new recording with the Hallé goes some way to counter.

We're conscious here of a consistent emotional trajectory that contrasts the ambiguities, uncertainties and shafts of melancholy of the outer movements, 'Gigues' and 'Rondes de printemps', with the brightness, vividness and immediacy of 'Ibéria'. Speed and pace are finely calibrated, giving the music enough space to allow detail to register without losing sight of momentum or cumulative tension. Wistfulness and regret can be heard in the woodwind solos that frame the central dance of 'Gigues', while the constantly shifting time-changes of 'Rondes' throw us continually off balance, despite the persistent underlying pulse and the shimmering brilliance of the scoring. The outer movements of 'Ibéria', meanwhile,

are thrilling in their clarity and precision, with some wonderfully impertinent woodwind solos, and bags of swagger in the pizzicato strumming in 'Le matin d'un jour de fête'. At the work's centre, 'Les parfums de la nuit' is all heady sensuality, the Hallé strings sounding very lush and sweet, the habanera rhythm sustained with steady, quiet insistence. It's a very fine achievement indeed.

Its principal companion piece here is *Faune*, its opening coolly sensuous rather than languid, though the performance gains in tension as it progresses and there's a real surge of eroticism at its centre.

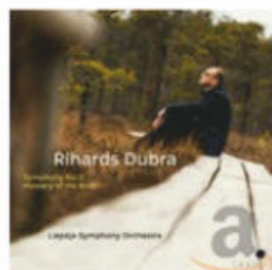
Dating from 1910, *La plus que lente* is a slow waltz originally written for piano and later expanded and orchestrated, its string textures prevented from cloying by the tangy cimbalom sound that underpins it. The disc also includes the first recording of Colin Matthews's orchestration of 'Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut' from the second book of piano *Images*. Debussy's dissonant parallel chords, fragmentary snatches of melody and hints of gamelan are given a slightly chilly radiance by Matthews's woodwind, while strings and harp suggest momentary awe and mystery – a work of eerie beauty, played with wonderful finesse. **Tim Ashley**

Dubra

Symphony No 2. Mystery of his Birth

Liepāja Symphony Orchestra / Atvars Lakstigala

Skani © LMIC080 (48' • DDD)



In the extended interview with Dāvis Engēlis contained in the accompanying

booklet to this disc, Rihards Dubra discusses many aspects of his symphonic writing and his interests, including Handel and American minimalism, his teachers in Latvia and his past as a rock musician. All these things have in some way fed into his Symphony No 2; but while it is certainly far more than the sum of these separate strands, it also seems to me a most elusive kind of work.

The other thing Dubra talks about in some detail is the breadth required of a symphony, the need to deal with the serious, the substantial, and that is certainly something one can feel from the work's very first notes; there is a feeling of expectation, of some great event about to take place. The first movement builds slowly and smoothly up to that event, which occurs in the last few minutes as a kind of *moto perpetuo* explosion that does

not entirely avoid a suggestion of *Star Wars*. The second movement initially suggests a memory of medieval music, or a refraction of an Armenian duduk, enveloped within a percussive minimalist haze, before the weight of the narrative is passed to the strings before returning to woodwind at about the halfway point. The lushness that then ensues is briefly and unexpectedly soured but the overwhelming impression is one of ecstasy. The symphony ends with an explosion of brass- and bell-laden drama and considerable rhythmic energy before building to what is a surprisingly conventional sort of apotheosis.

Mystery of his Birth is very similar to the symphony in terms of vocabulary (one might be forgiven for thinking that it was a fourth movement), but with a surprising irruption, with the solo cello, of something recalling English pastoralism. The Leipāja players are superb under Atvars Lakstigala, and miss no nuance of the textural balance so essential to this music, while the superb recorded sound allows every detail to come through with astonishing clarity. **Ivan Moody**

Elgar • Clyne

Clyne DANCE Elgar Cello Concerto, Op 85

Inbal Segev VC

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Marin Alsop

Avie © AV2419 (55' • DDD)



I'm struggling to remember the last time a piece of contemporary music

made me cry. Ten weeks of solitary lockdown has doubtless heightened emotions but in the final movement of Anna Clyne's *DANCE*, a cello concerto in all but name, a bear-hug of a theme emerges through angry, percussive *col legno* snaps that is so beautiful, so heartfelt that it instantly drew tears on first hearing. Repeated listening had a similar effect.

The cello is Clyne's own instrument and she admits in an interview that she never tires of playing, confessing to tucking a quotation from a Bach Sarabande into her new work. At 25 minutes in length, it's a substantial piece. It was written for the Israeli cellist Inbal Segev and, listening before reading any booklet notes, I detected an eastern influence. The work is dedicated to Clyne's Jewish father, whose family came from Poland. Each of the five movements bears as its title a line from a poem by the Persian poet Rumi. The first movement, 'Dance, when you're broken open', is a lament with the cello keening in



Emotional punch: Inbal Segev champions the music of Anna Clyne alongside a passionate account of Elgar's Cello Concerto

a high register, immediately putting me in mind of John Tavener's *The Protecting Veil*.

'Dance, if you've torn the bandage off' is aggressive, folklike in its energy, peppered with double-stops and drones. The reflective 'Dance in the middle of the fighting' takes the repeated cello melody higher and higher, while 'Dance in your blood' treats the orchestra as a 'looping pedal', building to a powerful climax before winding down to a lullaby. But it's the finale, 'Dance, when you're perfectly free', with its big nostalgic theme, that packs the emotional punch. Segev has performed the work a couple of times in concert and plays it here with dark tone and deep insight, closely supported by Marin Alsop and the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Clyne writes that Elgar's Cello Concerto is one of her favourite works, so – with exactly 100 years separating them – the Elgar makes for a perfect partner on this disc. And what a performance! I enjoyed this much more than another recent recording with a London orchestra (Sheku Kanneh-Mason and the LSO), mainly because, as securely as Kanneh-Mason plays, he's yet to fully inhabit this concerto. Right from the opening recitative, Segev is more inclined to wear her heart on her sleeve. She is recorded closely, too, so her resiny, mahogany tone speaks more directly

to the listener, although this close balance doesn't detract from the gossamer semiquaver runs of the second movement. Segev builds to the *appassionato* climax of the *Adagio* most persuasively (2'28") and the *Quasi recitativo* at the start of the fourth movement takes on the quality of a soliloquy. Here is a cellist with something to say. Alsop and the LPO are terrific, the only quibble being a rather lumbering pace at fig 59 (4'56") in the finale. Fans of the Elgar Concerto need to hear this disc, but Clyne's *DANCE* should make many friends too. **Mark Pullinger**

Elgar – selected comparison:

Kanneh-Mason, LSO, Rattle (2/20) (DECC) 485 0241

G Gordon

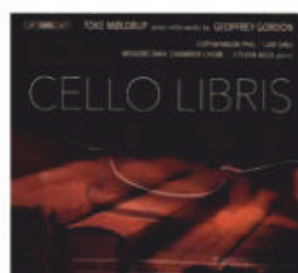
'Cello Libris'

Cello Concerto^a. Five Impressions of 'The Tempest' (Fathoms)^b. Ode to a Nightingale^c

Toke Møldrup *vc* **Steven Beck** *pf*

^c**Mogens Dahl Chamber Choir / Mogens Dahl;**

^a**Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra / Lan Shui**
BIS © BIS2330 (82' • DDD)



This is apparently the first release to be dedicated to Geoffrey Gordon

(b1968), though the composer has built up a substantial and wide-ranging catalogue over the last quarter of a century, with the three works featured here attesting to his imaginative outlook on the musical past.

Inspired by *Doktor Faustus*, Thomas Mann's powerful if often fanciful take on the creative ego, the Cello Concerto (2013) falls into a Prologue, seven Episodes and Epilogue that play continuously for 24 minutes (paralleling those 24 years of creativity granted in the Faustian pact). Its trajectory from 'innocence to madness' might easily risk overkill but the Dutilleux-like finesse Gordon instils into the relationship of soloist and orchestra (cello only coming to the fore in two trenchant cadenza passages) helps to maintain expressive focus throughout.

The other pieces are hardly less arresting. *Fathoms* (2015) consists of five impressions after Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with a substantial Prologue representing the storm sequence; the six movements resulting in a cello sonata of a cohesion because of, rather than despite, these extramusical associations. Most distinctive are the final movements, a free-form fantasy that evokes the isle full of noises then a sustained leave-taking whose inexorable descent mirrors that of Prospero drowning his book. More concrete in its

associations, *Ode to a Nightingale* (2013) sets all eight stanzas of Keats's poem in writing – luminous and astringent by turns – that builds toward an ecstatic culmination with the cello wholly subsumed into the chorus, before those two sound-sources ineluctably move apart as does the poet from his inspiration.

It remains to add that performances are consistently excellent, Toke Møldrup equally at home in the three highly contrasted contexts, but the booklet notes seem more intent on selling than explaining these works. On this evidence, Gordon's music is more than able to promote itself.

Richard Whitehouse

Haydn

Cello Concertos, HobVIIb – No 1^a; No 2^b.

Symphony No 13 – Adagio cantabile^c

Natalie Clein ^{vc} **Recreation – Grosses**

Orchester Graz / Michael Hofstetter

Oehms © OC1895 (57' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Stefaniensaal, Graz,

^aApril 24-25, ^bNovember 13-^c14, 2017



Period performance isn't necessarily something naturally associated with the

British cellist Natalie Clein but this live recording of Haydn's two cello concertos, partnered with the earlier *Adagio cantabile* in G, taken over two sets of 2017 concerts at the Stefaniensaal, Graz, immediately grabs the attention for being so very thoroughly of that world.

From Clein herself this has meant stringing her 1777 Guadagnini with gut strings, using a lighter bow and creating her own lyrical and period-aware cadenzas, one of which was courageously improvised on the spot (and it's impossible to tell which one). This is complemented orchestrally by crisp, airy support at sprightly tempos from the poised baroque forces of Recreation – Grosses Orchester Graz, complete with harpsichord continuo. Also ear-catching is the decision to 'crush' the usually evenly measured grace notes of the C major *Adagio*'s theme into snappier acciaccatura territory: a Baroque-redolent approach I've only previously heard on disc from Edgar Moreau and Il Pomo d'Oro in their feisty reading (Erato, 12/15).

The results are great. For starters, that lighter bow has yielded both a lovely sense of freedom and graceful forwards flow, along with some wonderfully buoyant detached articulation – listen to the way her tastefully ornamented C major Concerto's rapid passagework pleasures the ear with its

precise gossamer flutterings punctuated by meatily biting low-register thumps. Equally, though, there's also plenty of opportunity to enjoy Clein's warmly shining tones over more legato playing – the D major Concerto in particular is awash with proudly singing lines, and her aria-like poetry across the *Adagio cantabile*'s long lines is exquisite. In fact, it's those two works that stand for me as the album's highlights, although I suspect that's largely down to the engineering; while Clein's being well out in front of the orchestra generally works, the C major Concerto frustrates for it being impossible to position certain super-soft held notes below the orchestral surface as Haydn intended, despite Clein herself coming right down.

Clein fans certainly shouldn't hesitate to buy this one. If it's simply a period-aware set of the concertos that you're after, however, I'd still recommend either Steven Isserlis or Jean-Guihen Queyras, both of whom also offer more ingenious and generous surrounding programmes.

Charlotte Gardner

Concertos – selected comparisons:

Queyras (10/04) (HARM) HMG50 1816

Isserlis (A/17) (HYPE) CDA68162

Ichmouratov

Symphony, 'On the Ruins of an Ancient Fort', Op 55. Overtures – Maslenitsa, Op 36; Youth, Op 50

Orchestre de la Francophonie /

Jean-Philippe Tremblay

Chandos © CHAN20172 (73' • DDD)



Airat Ichmouratov (b1973) is a Tatarstan-born, Canadian-resident composer.

He has lived in Montreal since the 1990s but his musical roots are Russian to the core. The overture *Youth* (2016) is a light, fun concert-opener, rather in the manner of some of Shostakovich's lighter overtures. It was commissioned by the Orchestre de la Francophonie and Jean-Philippe Tremblay, who play it here with relish, audibly enjoying the theatrical atmosphere, almost circus-like in places.

At almost 14 minutes, *Youth* is a touch overlong, a fault he avoided in the other overture here, *Maslenitsa* (2016). The title translates as 'Pancake Week' and refers to the week-long pre-Lent festival in the Orthodox calendar. A vibrantly orchestrated homage to Glinka and Mussorgsky, a little after four minutes in there is an imaginatively scored passage

that reminded me of the Sibelius of the theatre scores, before the music transmutes seamlessly into Ichmouratov's standard manner.

The Symphony in A minor, *On the Ruins of an Ancient Fort*, is an example of Ichmouratov drawing inspiration from his adoptive homeland, the edifice in question being Fort Longueil. Commissioned by the Longueil Symphony Orchestra, the symphony is colourful and descriptive rather after the manner of, say, Kalinnikov or Steinberg, a touch prolix in places (it runs here past 47 minutes in duration). Attractive if not great music, the first three movements evoke in turn the 17th-century fort (and its commander, Baron de Longueil), the bustling modern city and the founder of the local convent, Mother Marie-Rose Durocher (as well as the composer's then recently deceased mother); the finale gathers up the various expressive threads. Composed in 2015-17, composition dates of a century earlier would not have surprised me. The Orchestre de la Francophonie under Jean-Philippe Tremblay perform it and the overtures more than capably, and with affection. Excellent sound, as usual.

Guy Rickards

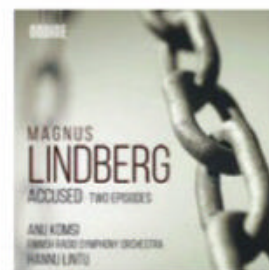
M Lindberg

Accused^a. Two Episodes

^aAnu Komsu ^{sop} **Finnish Radio**

Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu

Online © ODE1345-2 (57' • DDD • T/t)



Lindberg's *Accused* sets three transcripts from real-life interrogations. Indecipherability of

the words dogged the piece when it was premiered in London in 2015 with Vladimir Jurowski conducting Barbara Hannigan and the London Philharmonic. A recording can get around that to an extent but this one, courtesy of good engineering and Anu Komsu's diction, puts some of Lindberg's text-setting in the dock in the process. Particularly so in the third piece, in which 'the accused' is the absent Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning and the text, full of banal detail, is made to jump through myriad hoops. In that movement Lindberg's strange decision to have one singer as both accuser and accused is mitigated marginally, given the accused's yes/no answers. In the middle piece, where an East German is questioned on her illegal reading of *Der Spiegel* by the Stasi, you feel Lindberg trying to solve the problem of the binary dialogue but failing. Only the first

piece functions properly with its text, given a woman of the French Revolution essentially sings a monologue.

Komsí may not have Hannigan's elasticity but she is in strong, agile voice and can do special things, not least in her final utterance. While the Manning accusation devolves into tense chamber music, the Stasi one is a raucous cat-and-mouse game. Only the French section truly illuminates Lindberg's figurative concept of the individual (the singer) against the state (the orchestra); the full force of the ensemble waits for the Mademoiselle to get out of the way before cresting and crashing in a series of huge, threatening waves in Lindberg's unmistakable style.

Episodes was also commissioned by the LPO, for performance with Beethoven's Ninth. Lindberg is subtle in his homage to the older score, using rhythmic cells as fuel for his otherwise familiar structures whereby stepping bass lines shunt the music on to grand new harmonic planes, and the music billows outwards towards pillars that dissolve into mesmerising harmonies mapped from overtone spectrums. So nothing particularly new, beyond the different and more pronounced gait of those rhythms, but that doesn't stop the music thrilling in that pulverising Lindberg way, with every part of the orchestra, top to bottom, part of the argument. Lintu's Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra is, yet again, on eye-widening form. **Andrew Mellor**

MacMillan

Viola Concerto^a. Symphony No 4

^aLawrence Power *va*

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins
Hyperion © CDA68317 (72' • DDD)



Onyx's 2016 release of James MacMillan's Symphony No 4 featured this large-

scale single-movement work alongside the composer's Violin Concerto. Here the symphony is paired with another concerto, this time for viola.

They make for a good match. The concerto must still have been fresh in MacMillan's mind when he started work on the symphony as both share similar material, yet in other respects they are quite different. The concerto is direct and immediately accessible while on first listening the symphony seems dense, complex and impenetrable. MacMillan's use of the solo viola's plangent tone and lyrical qualities in the concerto evokes the trademark 'keening' effects of earlier works

such as *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* and *Tuireadh*. Here it is applied more sparingly, however, in a less mannered way, and often in combination with other elements.

During the slow second movement these sighing, singing lines combine to create expressive moments of almost unbearable intensity. In contrast, the first and last movements emphasise the viola's gritty rhythmic character – MacMillan winding up an agitated clock-like *perpetuum mobile* to propel the music forwards. Both the solo viola's effervescent and introspective qualities are brought vividly to the surface in a subtly graded and nuanced performance by Lawrence Power.

By comparison, MacMillan's Symphony No 4 at times resembles a supercharged concerto for orchestra, with each instrument given its moment to shine (including solo viola). The pulse-like opening in certain respects recalls Rautavaara's Fifth (another symphony constructed in a single timespan), although we have to wait until the end for MacMillan's crashing chords, which seem to signal the work's gasping death pangs rather than a coming-into-being of nature's elemental forces. In between these two powerful bookending moments the listener is taken on an eclectic journey that draws on everything from Renaissance polyphony to Mahler, Shostakovich and Andriessen. The transitions are smoother on this recording under Martyn Brabbins and the BBC Philharmonic, the overall pacing steadier than on the Onyx release. Renaissance elements are heard in the form of quotations from the 16th-century Scottish composer Robert Carver's 10-voice Mass *Dum sacrum mysterium*, transplanted Tippett-like to multiple strings, employed here not so much as a binding element but more as a stylistic pivot to guide the music in different directions – links in a stylistic chain that yields a rich and multilayered work.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Symphony No 4 – comparative version:

BBC Scottish SO, Rumdies (12/16) (ONYX) ONYX4157

Prokofiev

Autumnal, Op 8. The Gambler – Suite. Gypsy Fantasy, Op 127. The Mistress of the Copper Mountain, Op 129. Wedding Suite, Op 126

Lahti Symphony Orchestra / Dima Slobodeniouk
BIS © BIS2301 (62' • DDD/DSD)



Quietly and without fuss, Moscow-born Finnish-resident Dima Slobodeniouk has been

rising through the ranks with posts in Galicia and Lahti and a growing catalogue of recordings. Specialist repertoire and concerto accompaniments predominate and he has already made his debut with the Berlin Philharmonic, choosing Prokofiev's formidable Second Symphony. As the present disc confirms, he has a distinctive way with the composer, prizing lucidity over clamour.

In the 'Four Portraits and a Dénouement' from *The Gambler*, his refined approach is refreshing. These days the parent opera is more familiar to Western audiences than this character-led orchestral compendium as recorded by Neeme Järvi (Chandos, 9/90). Patched together like Prokofiev's Third Symphony, its five movements are a sequence of recomposed mini tone poems rather than a conventional suite of highlights. Järvi concentrates on extracting heavyweight string tone and Soviet-style rasp from his Scottish players; Slobodeniouk in Lahti probes deeper, finding shadowy intimations of Martinů and Messiaen in Pauline's portrait. That said, the 'Dénouement' (not in fact the end of the opera) was unarguably more exciting in Dundee! That the work contains no extended arias need not preclude memorable invention.

The Stone Flower is one of those oddly placid late Prokofiev scores which hostile commentators are inclined to dismiss out of hand. The melodic material lacks the memorability of *Romeo and Juliet*, perhaps to be expected given that the composer was gravely ill, short of funds and ideologically under a cloud in the late 1940s. At the same time, the ballet preserves some of *Cinderella*'s fascination with delicate, offbeat sonorities and its harmonic language is less predictable when the plot gives Prokofiev the excuse (or political cover) to try something new. Gianandrea Noseda's version of the complete work (Chandos, 6/03) is inclined to lugubriousness and for non-specialists the present selection may suffice. Slobodeniouk draws mainly from suites Prokofiev extracted before the project reached the stage, mixing and matching available material. Common to both recordings is the evocative Prologue with its metallic trio of trumpets depicting the Mistress of the Copper Mountain. Under Noseda the music can threaten to lose its bearings. Slobodeniouk preserves more sense of line. There is at times a certain pallor but the coda of the *Gypsy Fantasy* takes off at a tremendous lick.

Between music from these contrasting theatre pieces Slobodeniouk slips in another obscurity, the early *Autumnal*

or *Autumnal Sketch* which in places sounds like an effort by Prokofiev's friend, Nikolay Myaskovsky. It was written when the two were apprentice composers in thrall to Scriabin and the Rachmaninov of *The Isle of the Dead*. For good or ill neither Järvi (Chandos, 2/91) nor Slobodeniouk dawdles here.

The package includes attractive artwork, a booklet note from Andrew Huth and a surround-sound option facilitated by the finely focused acoustic of Lahti's Sibelius Hall. **David Gutman**

Rimsky-Korsakov

Sheherazade, Op 35. *Capriccio espagnol*, Op 34. Russian Easter Festival Overture, Op 36
Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko
LAWO © LWC1198 (75' • DDD)



After his avian double bill of *The Firebird* and *The Golden Cockerel* with the RLPO (Onyx,

1/19), Vasily Petrenko has now recorded a complete disc devoted to Rimsky-Korsakov with his Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra for the Norwegian label LAWO Classics. The beguiling *Sheherazade* continues to be a great concert warhorse, but although she was the darling of the LPO era, studio recordings have been distinctly thin on the ground since Sasha Goetzel's invigorating account with the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic in 2014.

Petrenko has a keen ear for drama and his *Sheherazade* is full of dash and derring-do, often with tempos to match. There is plenty of momentum to Sinbad's ship and a lively storm and shipwreck in the outer movements. Petrenko doesn't hang about in 'The Young Prince and the Young Princess' either, lacking in languor, although the central episode has the princess's palanquin jogging along perkily. Goetzel draws a wider spectrum of colours from his Turkish orchestra, enhancing the already intoxicating perfume of Rimsky's orchestration by having *Sheherazade* accompanied by a qanun rather than the usual harp in her recitatives. Oslo concertmaster Elise Båtnes is a sweet-toned storyteller, though, bringing great delicacy to her solos. Petrenko is more relaxed in 'The Tale of the Kalender Prince', allowing his woodwind soloists time to express their co-narrations, even if the bassoon and clarinet sound a little veiled in a recording that doesn't always allow bags of detail to emerge, although the Oslo Concert Hall isn't as reverberant as the Borusan's Istanbul venue.

The other two Rimsky works were performed by the orchestra in concert just before these sessions took place in May 2019. The *Capriccio espagnol* is immaculate, if lacking some Mediterranean earthiness, although I loved the poise of the flautist in the 'Scena e canto gitano' (track 4, 1'22"), which made it sound like a forerunner of the Ballerina in Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. That pearly flute also shines in the *Russian Easter Festival Overture*, where the recording's big-boned sound produces plenty of power and permits all the percussion glitter required in the joyful finale. **Mark Pullinger**

Sheherazade – selected comparison:

Borusan Istanbul PO, Goetzel (9/14) (ONYX) ONYX4124

Vivaldi

Three Clarinet Concertos (arr Tarkmann).
Il Giustino – Sinfonia. *Juditha triumphans*, RV644 – Air, 'La tortora' (arr Tarkmann).
L'Olimpiade – Overture

Martin Fröst cl *Concerto Köln*

Sony Classical © 19075 92991-2 (59' • DDD)



There's Venetian intrigue here, a touch of smoke and mirrors. The booklet cover

itself raises two questions. 'Martin Fröst Vivaldi' is the disc's title yet, although the Red Priest did write for both clarinet and salmoè (chalumeau, a reed instrument that developed from the recorder) in a handful of concerti grossi, he never composed any solo concertos for the clarinet, an instrument which was still in its infancy at the start of the 18th century. What Fröst plays here are three 'hypothetical concertos' reimagined by Andreas Tarkmann who, focusing on the instrument's vocal qualities, draws on operatic arias.

Each is given a title – let's face it, Vivaldi's best-known concertos are the ones with nicknames – so we have the B flat *Sant'Angelo*, the D minor *La fenice* and the F major *Il mezzettino*. So far, so good. Fröst has the excellent period-instrument *Concerto Köln* as his partners in crime and he plays on a specially made boxwood clarinet (see page 11 for more details). This is no recreation of the two- or three-key early clarinet, which had a weak and windy lower register, but has all the usual keyword of the modern instrument. Its sound is warm and buttery, particularly in its low 'chalumeau' register, and its agility, spinning around Vivaldi's dazzling vocal lines, is incredible. Warning: do not attempt this on your period clarinet!

Fröst is an outstanding musician and every operatic roulade and embellishment is expertly turned with the precision of a master craftsman. The finale of the *Sant'Angelo* (taken from *Ottone in villa*) bubbles with high spirits and you sense the relish of Fröst's scorching attacks in the fast runs of 'Alma oppressa' (from *La fida ninfa*) in the first movement of *La fenice*.

Do they convince as concertos? Not especially, but I don't think that's the point. If Tarkmann had wanted to strike more of an authentic note, there are around 350 solo concertos that could have been purloined and transcribed. What make these enjoyable works in their own right are the florid writing and operatic drama of the outer movements and the incredible tenderness that Vivaldi lavished on some of his slow arias, such as 'Mentre dormi' from *L'olimpiade* and the beguiling pizzicato accompaniment he used in 'Sento in seno' in *Il Giustino*. Vivaldi's operas have often been compared unfavourably to Handel's, yet Tarkmann's selection demonstrates his remarkable range of invention.

There is *echt* Vivaldi here, a couple of operatic sinfonias played with energy and fire by *Concerto Köln*. The disc ends with 'Veni, me sequera fida', an aria about the lament of a turtle dove from the oratorio *Juditha triumphans*, in which Vivaldi deployed the soprano chalumeau in an obbligato role. Here the vocal line is taken by the cellist Alexander Scherf, effectively turning it into a beautiful duet.

And the other question about the cover? Why on earth is Fröst pictured wielding his standard Buffet Crampon instrument when he plays a boxwood clarinet on this disc? That's a mystery that remains unsolved but seems a bit of an own goal on Sony's part.

Mark Pullinger

'Affinity'

Brouwer *El Decamerón Negro* **C Brubeck** Guitar
Concerto, 'Affinity'^a **Danielpour** Of Love and Longing^b **Lauro** Waltz No 3, 'Natalia'^c **Tan Dun** Seven Desires

Sharon Isbin, ^cColin Davin gtr ^bIsabel Leonard sngr

^aMaryland Symphony Orchestra /

Elizabeth Schulze

Zoho © ZM202005 (55' • DDD • T)



'Affinity' by name, affinity by nature, Sharon Isbin's terrific latest

recording evinces a wonderful talent for making fully hers what was written for her, regardless of style.



The Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra highlight the drama in some of Rimsky-Korsakov's most intoxicating works

Chris Brubeck's Concerto for guitar and orchestra *Affinity* is a single-movement work in three sections: the first bright, jazzy and energetic; the second, based on a melody by his father, jazz great Dave Brubeck, mellow and Chopin-haunted; the third a whirling percussive dance infused with foot-tapping Brazilian and Middle Eastern vibes. Though Rodrigo isn't far away, either. Ably accompanied by the Maryland Symphony Orchestra under Elizabeth Schulze, Isbin gives a sparkling, virtuoso account that neatly underscores Brubeck's bountiful musical syncretism, while revealing a wider vista with smaller peaks and valleys visible in the distance.

Though smaller in scale, Brouwer's colourful *El Decamerón Negro* for solo guitar also boasts three sections but its romantic tale of love and war achieves its intensity through intimacy, Isbin relishing the sweeping scales and arpeggios, the toccata-like textures and the programmatic elements. After a delightful interlude in the form of a duet version, arranged by and performed with Isbin's former student Colin Davin, of Lauro's popular Waltz No 3, Isbin returns to the subject of love with Tan Dun's extraordinary *Seven Desires*, a surreal courting ritual between

flamenco guitar and pipa, and Richard Danielpour's three Rumi settings for voice and guitar, *Of Love and Longing*, in which she is joined by the soprano Isabel Leonard. Thanks in large part to Leonard's clear diction and languid phrasing, we're suddenly made aware that a more transcendent, spiritual love was with us on the journey all along.

William Yeoman

'Bohemian Tales'

Dvořák Violin Concerto, Op 53 B96^a.

Humoresque, Op 101 B187 No 7 (transcr Kreisler)^b. Larghetto, Op 75 B150 No 4^b.

Songs My Mother Taught Me, Op 55 B104 No 4^b

Janáček Violin Sonata^b **Suk** Four Pieces, Op 17^b

Augustin Hadelich *vn*^b **Charles Owen** *pf*^a **Bavarian**

Radio Symphony Orchestra / Jakub Hrůša

Warner Classics © 9029 52745-7 (81' • DDD)



account of the Brahms Concerto (Warner, 6/19), and his new recording of the Dvořák is equally impressive. How warmly his *dolce*

playing seems to smile (listen at 6'05" in the opening *Allegro ma non troppo*, for example), and how his tone gleams with steely strength when called for (as at 9'35" in the same movement). He uses portamento with expressive elegance (the opening of the slow movement is a sublime example), and can whittle his tone down to the finest strand without losing tonal focus (try the *Adagio*'s coda at 9'41"). Note, too, the way Hadelich suggests a wiry-sounding folk fiddle in the finale's D minor interlude (starting at 3'53").

Jakub Hrůša has the Bavarian RSO playing with vigour and a comparable sense of care. I find his and Hadelich's tempo for the finale a hair fast – Josef Suk, first with Ančerl (Supraphon, 4/96) and later with Neumann (also Supraphon), somehow conveys both the *giocoso* and *ma non troppo* modifiers of the *Allegro* tempo marking – although, thankfully, they do relax in the lyrical sections.

Czech works for violin and piano fill out the exceptionally generous programme. Hadelich and his longtime recital partner Charles Owen transform the last of Dvořák's *Four Romantic Pieces*, Op 75, into an aching, darkly passionate miniature tone-painting. Their reading

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Christian Hoskins welcomes the widespread availability of some high-class playing from the NHK Symphony Orchestra under Paavo Järvi



Sheer excellence: Paavo Järvi guides the NHK Symphony Orchestra in outstanding Strauss and Mahler

The somewhat arbitrary distribution of Paavo Järvi's Sony/RCA recordings outside of Japan often means eye-wateringly high prices for collectors interested in particular recordings, especially in SACD format. Fortunately, a number of them have recently been made available on streaming platforms and as high-resolution downloads, including this series of recordings made in concert with the NHK Symphony Orchestra.

Strauss's *Don Quixote* was recorded in Suntory Hall at the start of Järvi's tenure as chief conductor of the orchestra back in October 2015. With the cellist Truls Mørk joined by the orchestra's principal viola, Ryo Sasaki, in the two main concertante parts, it's a vivid, characterful and compelling

interpretation. The close-up recording and wide dynamic range of the sound can be slightly overbearing at times, though – the sheep in the second variation bite with piranha-sharp teeth, the seventh variation sounds more like the onslaught of a storm than a ride through the air and Mørk's every intake of breath in the poignant finale is clearly audible. Also included on the album are a lively and virtuoso account of *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* and a polished, extrovert reading of the orchestral suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*. As with *Don Quixote*, however, the energy of the interpretations comes somewhat at the expense of the music's warmth and rapture.

Recorded the following year, a second Strauss album featuring *Also sprach Zarathustra* and *Metamorphosen* enjoys

better sound and more rounded performances. Indeed, Järvi's version of *Zarathustra* strikes me as one of the finest ever, a recording to stand alongside those of Reiner, Karajan and Previn. The performance of the opening 'Sunrise' makes such an impact that I initially wondered whether the rest of the piece might sound anticlimactic in comparison, but Järvi sustains the intensity through to the end. The climax of 'The Convalescent' (track 7, 1'24"), where the entire orchestra including the organ plays *fff* for eight bars, is absolutely overwhelming, and he builds the 'Tanzlied' to a thrilling conclusion. Elsewhere there's radiance and passion aplenty, and although the tempo for 'Von der Hinterweltlern' is on the slow side, the beauty of the NHK Symphony Orchestra's string-playing is more than adequate compensation. The eloquence of the orchestra's strings also makes a strong impression in *Metamorphosen*, conducted by Järvi with a powerful sense of purpose and sympathy with the work's emotional trajectory.

Also dating from 2016, an album of **Mussorgsky** works features *Pictures at an Exhibition*, the Entr'acte from Act 4 of *Khovanshchina* as orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakov and the original version of *Night on the Bare Mountain*. The delicacy, refinement and heft of the playing are extremely impressive here, the fluidity of the trumpet solo in 'Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle' being just one example of the quality of the contributions from the front-desk players. Järvi conjures a wonderful sense of atmosphere in the quieter pieces and rounds off the performance with arresting accounts of 'Baba Yaga' and the 'The Great Gate of Kiev'. With similarly persuasive performances of the two shorter pieces and good recorded sound, this is a very impressive release.

Mahler's Sixth Symphony was a centrepiece of the orchestra's visit to Europe in February and March 2017 and enjoyed considerable acclaim from critics. I attended the performance given at the Royal Festival Hall in London and was impressed not only by the sense of an orchestra devoting its considerable technical prowess to the meticulous illumination of the score but also by the depth of feeling communicated in the process. The same qualities are apparent in this vivid recording from concerts given in Yokohama immediately prior to the tour. As with his video recording with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra

for C Major, Järvi performs the symphony with the Scherzo placed second and with two hammer blows in the finale. The performance of the *Andante* is relatively swift, particularly on the approach to the main climax, but otherwise Järvi's reading is judiciously paced and superbly controlled. It's an excellent account of the symphony by any standards.

The final item here, a collection of orchestral pieces from **Wagner's** *Der Ring des Nibelungen* recorded in 2018, is by some margin the least interesting. Järvi eschews the 'symphonic synthesis' approach encountered in many recent recordings (including those by Neeme and Kristjan Järvi) in favour of discrete extracts. The collection opens rather idiosyncratically with the music from Wotan's Farewell, after which we get the Ride of the Valkyries, Forest Murmurs, Siegfried's Funeral March, Dawn and Siegfried's Rhine Journey and, concluding the sequence, the Entry of the Gods into Valhalla. Both the Ride of the Valkyries and the Rhine Journey are performed in the versions with concert endings appended. The orchestra contributes its usual flair and commitment – the solo playing in Forest Murmurs is particularly exquisite – but as Mark Pullinger observed when reviewing the same team's Bartók performances (7/20), the results here are not entirely convincing. The sheer excellence of Järvi and his Japanese orchestra's performances of Strauss and Mahler leaves their Wagner sounding a little half-hearted in comparison. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



R Strauss Don Quixote, etc
NHK SO / P Järvi
Sony Classical (F) SICC19020



R Strauss Also sprach Zarathustra, etc
NHK SO / P Järvi
Sony Classical (F) SICC10219 **G**



Mussorgsky Orchestral Works
NHK SO / P Järvi
Sony Classical (F) SICC19026



Mahler Symphony No 6
NHK SO / P Järvi
Sony Classical (F) SICC19040



Wagner Ring selections
NHK SO / P Järvi
Sony Classical (F) SICC19043

of the Janáček Sonata is similarly gripping and overflowing with imaginative detail – listen, say, to Hadelich's urgent, guttural tone at the start, the profound tenderness of Owen's quiet playing in the Ballada and the disorientating fury with which they tear into the *Allegretto*. The four Suk pieces may lack the emotional force of Janáček's work but here, too, the performance teems with incident.

A pair of 'encores' ends the recital with a nostalgic whiff of old-school charm. Indeed, Hadelich's phrasing and wistful portamento in Kreisler's arrangement of Dvořák's *Humoresque* would surely have made Kreisler himself proud. A superb disc on all counts.

Andrew Farach-Colton

'LA Phil 100'



Bjarnason From Space I Saw Earth **Lutosławski**
Symphony No 4 **Ravel** La valse **Stravinsky** The
Firebird – Suite (1919 version) **Wagner** Die
Meistersinger von Nürnberg – Prelude

**Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra / Gustavo
Dudamel, Zubin Mehta, Esa-Pekka Salonen**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

C Major Entertainment (F) (2) DVD 753408;
(F) Blu-ray 753504 (85' + 52' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •
DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Disc 2: 'The Los Angeles Philharmonic – The
Tradition of the New', a film by Laszlo Molnar
Recorded live at Walt Disney Hall, Los Angeles,
October 24, 2019



The LA Phil had more than a major birthday to celebrate at this concert, which marked 100 years to the day since its first performance in October 1919. It could afford to congratulate itself for reminding the world, now more than ever, that if a classical symphony orchestra doesn't relate to and physically resemble its home city, it's on borrowed time. The cameras at the centenary concert picked out the figure of Deborah Borda, who as erstwhile CEO can take most of the credit for the LA Phil's transformation. Her smartest move was hiring Gustavo Dudamel as chief conductor – the perfect fit for America's most forward-looking orchestra and most Hispanic city.

There's plenty of context for all that on the hagiographic documentary, *The Tradition of the New*. But the increasing diversity of the LA Phil's audience is as evident from the audience shots on this DVD as on regular Friday nights at Disney Hall. The concert unites the three living musicians who have served

as the orchestra's music director. You can see the logic for including each piece but at the same time, from an orchestra that can party, the serious programme means the party never really gets started.

Plenty of the Phil's other strengths are on show, chief among them the rhythmic sophistication and clarity instilled during 17 seasons under Esa-Pekka Salonen and his diet of 20th-century music including Lutosławski. The Fourth Symphony (an LA Phil commission) contains mind-bogglingly complicated rhythmic counterpoint in its harbouring of tension and expectation. It's no showpiece but it does call for exuberance, flair and character (particularly in its aleatoric passages) and gets them in this otherwise studied performance. There's an evocative bit of direction when the camera pans out from Disney Hall's French-fries organ case as the first movement splits into irregular shards.

The orchestra plays lovingly for Dudamel in the suite from Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, finding even more sensuality here than in Zubin Mehta's airy *La valse*. Dudamel has the best technique of all three and is great to watch on screen, the music always seeming to surprise him and widen his eyes still further. As undemonstrative as Mehta in his own way, he adds snap to that rhythmic diligence but the performance is never garish or fake.

Daniél Bjarnason's *From Space I Saw Earth* was written for the occasion and for participation from all three conductors; it's an extraordinary sight to see them waving their arms around in different styles a few metres apart, like silent chamber musicians surrounded by a mass of noise. The score has a chorale move at three autonomous speeds across three divisions of the orchestra, which the conductors must dock in to one another at particular junctions. The feeling is truly that of the title: music of the spheres, colossal planetary rotation, the grandest of grand gestures cast in Bjarnason's galactic orchestral upholstery. As in the related piece *Emergence*, when the harmonic resolutions align the feeling is of a universe in harmony. Odd to have no music by an American – and a celebration piece that moves so slowly and with such distance – but the LA Phil has championed the Icelandic composer-conductor like one of its own. Thousands of pieces of silver paper flutter down from the Disney Hall roof when the music finally evaporates. That's all folks!

Andrew Mellor

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Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*

Tenor **Ian Bostridge** shares his thoughts on this seminal song-cycle with David Patrick Stearns

For many listeners, Beethoven's contribution to the song literature starts and ends with his cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*, Op 98 – written in 1816, at the cusp of his magisterial late period. The six songs to his immortal beloved, connected by masterfully conceived piano-writing, begin Ian Bostridge's new Warner Classics disc of Beethoven 'Songs and Folksongs'. It's a work that shows the composer pointing the way to future song-cycles by other composers, just before waving goodbye to conventional vocal writing as he moved on to the more challenging Symphony No 9 and *Missa solemnis*.

At least, that's the simplest way to position *An die ferne Geliebte* in Beethoven's output and the Lieder repertoire in general. The truth is unusually complicated. 'It's typical of Beethoven to write just one piece in a particular genre that's an absolute masterpiece,' says Bostridge, 'just as he wrote one opera that is central to the repertoire.'

But while the cycle stands alone, there are some country cousins in Beethoven's output that illuminate it on the Bostridge recording – made in October 2019 at St Jude-on-the-Hill in London with Antonio Pappano on the piano. What emerges from close listening and an extended interview with Bostridge is an alternative image of Beethoven, rather different from the Promethean loner whose works have a chiselled-in-granite inevitability. Bostridge's repertoire choices reveal a composer who had a solid dialogue with his own time, and exercised it with his own kind of flexibility.

Like much of the Lieder being written around the same time, *An die ferne Geliebte* has strophic structures and texts that are repeated for poetic emphasis and to complete the musical structure. The articulation of those elements to maximise the music's meaning might be a rich talking point for Bostridge, one of the most meticulous word-painters since Elisabeth Schwarzkopf; however, he operates not from any predefined strategy, but from instinct.

'I don't make decisions. If it sounded boring I would've done something about it,' he said. 'In this business of how much do you prepare, my ideal is being 99.9 per cent in the moment. It should be an expression in the moment but with energy and commitment. It has to be sung as if it's the most important thing in the world.' Most singers would say that that's their aim, too, but Bostridge's ears tell him otherwise: 'There's a lot of singing that's about the singing.'

The six short poems of *An die ferne Geliebte* come by their fresh-faced romantic naivety honestly. The poet was the 21-year-old physician Alois Isidor Jeitteles, who was not widely known and may have written the poems specifically for the song-cycle, enabling Beethoven to set them into piano-writing that made the cycle a cohesive whole.

The lyricism here suggests Beethoven might have been playing it safe. But not to Bostridge: '*An die ferne Geliebte* isn't easy. You have to have a good technique to sing it. No, I don't think he was playing it safe. He was following his aesthetic. Nothing should be very "arty". The songs are a direct expression of emotion, and an example of how great art achieves simplicity, but not artlessly.'



Bostridge and Pappano recorded Beethoven's song-cycle in London last October

In 'Wo die Berge so blau' ('Where the blue mountains', the second song), the recurring musical gesture around the words 'Möchte ich sein' ('There would I be') requires different treatment in each statement amid the shifting context of the poem. And that, in fact, requires premeditated consideration: 'I see it as a strong expression of the German concept of *Sehnsucht* – "longing". It has to be given degrees of intensity, sometimes breathless, sometimes bent a bit.'

The potentially troublesome rests that separate each note in the vocal line of the third song, 'Leichte Segler in den Höhen' ('Light clouds sailing on high'), can be heard as splintering the melody but are meticulously observed by Bostridge, even though other singers minimise or even ignore them. 'Well, they're wrong to do that,' he says. 'Beethoven has marked it with incredible care. But it's something that has to be absorbed ... then you reach an authenticity.'

The final song, 'Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder' ('Accept, then, these songs'), is the soul of the piece. Bostridge particularly marvels at the 'difficult to define' simplicity with which it moves between thematic events before the piano postlude that takes off with a sudden tempo acceleration – less extreme with Pappano than in the recent recording by Matthias Goerne and Jan Lisiecki on DG. 'It's just to end the piece with a surge,' said Bostridge. 'It's great when the piece rushes forwards to give the music lots of energy.'

That final song also embodies the Beethovenian concept – also found in the dedication to the *Missa solemnis* – of heart-to-heart communication through his music: 'This idea of speaking to the beloved by sending songs is a powerful one,' says Bostridge, 'the idea being that this art form contains something intense and genuine and true.'

In short, says Bostridge, '*An die ferne Geliebte* is very different from anything else I've ever sung.' That's a conclusion that Bostridge has reached having sung Beethoven for much of his adult life, and one that some scholars have verified with a more analytical process. William McCullough (in his 2015


thesis *Models for Beethoven's An die ferne Geliebte, Op. 98: A Stylistic Analysis*) determines that the work had antecedents in works by lesser-known composers such as Beethoven's teacher Christian Gottlob Neefe (1748-98). Bostridge makes the point that it 'was obviously a big spur to Schubert to up his game'. Direct evidence of that is Schubert's *Einsamkeit*, D620 (1818), which, with its six successive sections, has been variously described by scholars as a ballad, a cantata and a song-cycle. However, Schubert's later *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise* are not integrated in the way that *An die ferne Geliebte* is. McCullough also argues that even Schumann's integrated *Dichterliebe* isn't a Beethoven progeny but a different branch of the same tree. Bostridge's ears tell him something similar – that *Dichterliebe* came out of Schumann's cycles of piano miniatures such as *Carnaval*.

Bostridge believes – and he is not alone in this – that the individual components of *An die ferne Geliebte* are not very likely to stand confidently when taken out of context. That crucial interdependence among the songs would have to be intentional, since Beethoven knew perfectly well what a free-standing song would act and sound like – and many of them fill out the Bostridge disc.

'An die ferne Geliebte is very different from anything else I've ever sung... It was a big spur to Schubert to up his game'

Unlikely companions to *An die ferne Geliebte* are Scottish, Welsh and Irish folk songs harmonised by Beethoven mainly around the time of *An die ferne Geliebte* and usually thought to be the bottom of the barrel in his output. Such melodies were fashionable at the beginning of the 19th century; even Haydn harmonised his share. Bostridge's selection includes two fairly ambitious works with texts by Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns, and with piano trio accompaniments (violinist Vilde Frang and cellist Nicolas Altstaedt) that are more sophisticated than Beethoven's publisher had bargained for.

Curiously, one folk song harmonised three years before *An die ferne Geliebte* suggests that the composer's relationship to any given text wasn't as ironclad as one might think. In fact, Bostridge has replaced the folk song text of 'O! who, my dear Dermot' with the edgier 'Avenging and bright' by Thomas Moore (which Britten later used in his setting of the same folk melody). The change of text turns Beethoven's harmonisation into a work of much greater consequence. Elsewhere among the folk songs, some texts are so densely crowded into the melody that they can't always be clearly articulated, even by Bostridge. 'You do your best,' he says. 'But on the whole, it's the feeling of the song that's really important.'

So much for the romantic notion that great words are respectfully showcased by all great composers – and have only one possible enshrinement. Bostridge also sings Beethoven's *Sehnsucht*, four settings of the same Goethe text – some lyrical and outgoing, the last more like an inner monologue. In fact, composers of Beethoven's time seem to have followed no general rules about connecting with any given text. 'Text is absorbed by the music and the sounds of the music,' says Bostridge. 'Sometimes the meaning of the text is at odds with the music – and in an interesting way. And sometimes, the meaning of the text is actually irrelevant.' 

► To read our review of Bostridge's album of Beethoven songs turn to page 66



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Chamber



Andrew Farach-Colton enjoys a sparkling new 'Trout' Quintet:
'Consistent attention to detail never precludes expansive phrasing or inhibits burbling rhythmic vivacity' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**



Lindsay Kemp revels in a stylish French Baroque album:
'Dunford and Rondeau are steeped in this rich and subtle repertoire, and play it like they own it' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**

Aho

Halla^a. In memoriam Pehr Henrik Nordgren^b. Lamento^c. Piano Sonata No 2^d. Prelude, Toccata and Postlude^e. Solo Violin Sonata^b
^{abc}Jaakko Kuusisto, ^cPekka Kuusisto *vns*
^eSamuli Peltonen *vc* ^{ade}Sonja Fräki *pf*
BIS (F) BIS2186 (81' • DDD/DSD)



Highly prolific composers from Mozart to Martinů have a capacity to

pull flair and distinction out of the bag just as often as the same qualities elude them. Kalevi Aho is no exception. The works here find him in various states of mind but mostly diligence and distress.

The two pieces written to mourn fellow musicians are, in fact, the best. *Lamento* was created for the funeral of the violinist Sakari Laukola, who died young in 2001. It combines its sense of a eulogy with copious conflicting, searching emotions, fearlessly grappling with grief even in the moment. The tightly entwined Kuusisto brothers are not afraid of its raw emotions. Grief evidently draws Aho deep into his own creative sensibilities (especially when writing for his own instrument, the violin) and the memorial piece for the composer Pehr Henrik Nordgren is engaging in its combination of a salute with the search for a way out of the darkness; the use of a delimited scale based on the composer's name means it occupies its own space with a strong sense of identity. It's the best-played piece here, Jaakko Kuusisto's sincerity obvious and his tone particularly strong and beautiful high up.

Elsewhere, Aho's own identity can recede into the background, just as it does in some of his 31 concertos. It is less endearing than frustrating. The Solo Violin Sonata was written while the composer completed his national service in an alcohol clinic; we hear some desolation and pain in the piece, but also how Aho might have distracted himself with Bach and Bartók (Kuusisto, too,

sounds a little caught between worlds). The Prelude, Toccata and Postlude is concise and equally well worked but anonymously post-Shostakovich. Sonja Fräki has already recorded an entire disc of Aho piano music and sails through the Piano Sonata No 2, which riffs on Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* (and is surely even more tricky) but chases its own tail in its various retrospective objectives. This is music written straight from the hip and with force, but sometimes with Aho that's not quite enough to draw you back for a second listen. **Andrew Mellor**

Beethoven

Violin Sonatas - No 1, Op 12 No 1; No 5, 'Spring', Op 24; No 8, Op 30 No 3
Tamsin Waley-Cohen *vn* Huw Watkins *pf*
Signum (F) SIGCD618 (64' • DDD)



These are closely miked studio accounts, with little sense of the 300-seat Snape

Maltings acoustic in which they were recorded, but all the same imbued with the feeling of being caught on the wing. If a note or two of Beethoven's semiquaver flurries are swallowed up every now and again – in the opening sorties of Op 30 No 3, for instance – that's the price to be paid for performances which take authentically Beethovenian risks and leave nothing in the rehearsal studio. I'm thinking here, later in the same movement, of the nicely judged pauses to introduce and break up the second subject and Tamsin Waley-Cohen's pure-toned swells like guileless question marks immediately thereafter.

Such bold strokes of invention may pall on repetition for listeners wedded to the cloudless legato sunshine of Perlman/Ashkenazy or more recently attracted by the lively but cultivated partnership of James Ehnes and Andrew Armstrong (Onyx, 6/20) in this music. On their own terms, however, Waley-Cohen

and Watkins demonstrate a fine and modern appreciation for Beethoven the instrumental dramatist, anticipating Weber in the graceful cantilena of the central Minuet and Mendelssohn in the puckish humour of the finale. I enjoyed the flourish of the violinist's grand entrance in the First Sonata – like a ballgowned diva at the top of a staircase, cameras popping – as well as the more discreet elegance of her pianistic consort as he matches her step for step. The contrast between bow and keys is similarly marked in their address of the slow movement. In the quick finale, however, it's the violinist who plays second fiddle and tailors her articulation to the nimble fingers of her pianist.

Their complementary personalities (recorded with a balance in the violinist's favour, unlike Ehnes and Armstrong) meet most harmoniously in the *Spring* Sonata's *Adagio*, where Watkins draws an appealing, fortepiano-like resonance from the piano and Waley-Cohen's phrasing taps the music's pastoral roots. While the vestigial Scherzo passes without incident, the finale springs a surprise, taken rather less *Allegro* and more *ma non troppo* than most modern rivals. Waley-Cohen makes play here with the full palette of her tone-colours within a classically restrained canvas for the sonata as a whole – there's no romantically drawn-out pause for thought or mad dash for the double-bar. Each of the three sonatas inhabits its own costume, made to measure.

Peter Quantrill

Haydn

String Quartets, Op 76 Nos 1-3
Chiaroscuro Quartet
BIS (F) BIS2348 (71' • DDD/DSD)



Charles Burney hit the nail on the head. The Op 76 quartets, he wrote, were proof of Haydn's enduringly youthful creative spirit; music that sounded as if its 66-year-



Elegance and invention: Tamsin Waley-Cohen and Huw Watkins tailor their complementary personalities to the violin sonatas of Beethoven

old composer 'had expended none of his fire before'. There's still no more rewarding challenge for an ambitious string quartet, and when the Chiaroscuro Quartet recorded the Op 20 quartets a few years back (A/16, 9/17), Richard Wigmore heard a group who 'combine refined ensemble and intonation with an audible delight in the music's richness and inspired subversiveness'.

The same qualities are in evidence as the Chiaroscuros leap a generation to the ebullient public statements of the Op 76 set. Using gut strings on (mostly) 18th-century instruments, these are certainly historically informed performances. The group really don't hang around with the big chords that open No 1; accompaniment figures bristle (the articulation throughout is admirably crisp) and the minuets of No 1 and No 2 bound forwards as if spring-loaded.

Alina Ibragimova's gleaming sound bathes the top of the ensemble in sunlight but she's never more than first among equals, and Emilie Hörnlund's lovely matte viola tone, in particular, gives a real clarity to the trenchant motivic working in No 2's first movement. If

the slow movements can at first feel a little austere (the famous 'Emperor' melody in No 3 is a case in point), the understated poise and intelligence of the playing deepen with repeated listening.

But they know how to smile, too – listen to the group's subtle comic timing near the end of No 1 (they even change the tone-colour of the accompanying pizzicato). The overall effect is simultaneously fresh, thoughtful and wholly life-affirming. The Chiaroscuros' account of the remaining three Op 76 quartets can't come soon enough. **Richard Bratby**

Lim

Extinction Events and Dawn Chorus^a.

Axis mundi^b. Songs Found in Dream^c

^aSophie Schafleitner *vn* ^bLorelei Dowling *bn*

^{ac}Klangforum Wien / ^cStefan Asbury,

^aPeter Rundel

Kairos © 0015020KAI (63' • DDD)



Based at the University of Huddersfield, the Australian composer

Liza Lim is one of a growing number of contemporary composers who, like Jennifer Walshe and Chaya Czernowin, uses her music to address ecological issues and the Anthropocene. This portrait disc is a primer on Lim's music.

At 40 minutes, *Extinction Events and Dawn Chorus* is the centrepiece. Lim draws connections between enormous gyres of plastic rubbish swirling in the ocean and the debris of history around us (as in the classical tradition, quoting here via Janáček). The first movement, 'Anthropogenic Debris', opens with a brief descending semitone motif on woozy brass backed by scratching Waldteufels (a type of drum pierced by a string). Droning wind multiphonics give an impression of didgeridoos. The second movement's strident opening solo trumpet is marked 'with lyric abandon'. Throughout there is a sense of wonder mixed with despair, of nature grown delirious.

The style of post-new-complexity music, where extended instrumental techniques can mean one hears few distinct notes, lends itself to a focus on nature, a ferment of wild sound. Parts of *Extinction Events*' material comes from Lim's transcription

of the mating call of a now extinct bird, the Kauai O'o, a mating call forevermore unheard. The closing movement, 'Dawn Chorus', imitates the titular natural phenomenon in the coral reefs with a wonderful jabbering and clacking across the ensemble. It's quietly devastating. This music's stakes are higher than normal.

Axis mundi for solo bassoon refers to a tree in Norse mythology linking heaven and earth. The bassoon becomes a tree in animistic animation. Lorelei Dowling gives a wonderfully emphatic performance, switching seamlessly from microtone scales to enharmonic trills to glissandos.

A continuous work in five sections, *Songs Found in Dream* refers to Aboriginal song lines, wherein geographical landmarks embody myth. Lim unifies her material through the Aboriginal idea of *bir'yun*, using trill figures alongside percussive rattles. In places you might wish for a more memorable landmark, like a melodic phrase, but Lim's concern is elsewhere.

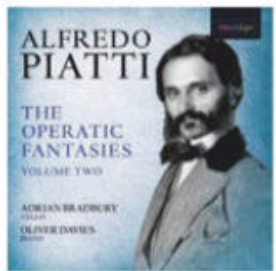
Liam Cagney

Piatti

'The Operatic Fantasies, Vol 2'

Capriccio sur des airs de Balfe. Introduction et Variations sur un thème de Lucia di Lammermoor, Op 2. Parafrasi sulla Barcarola del Marino Faliero. Rimembranze del Trovatore, Op 21. Rondò sulla Favorita. Souvenir de l'opéra Linda di Chamounix, Op 13

Adrian Bradbury *vc* Oliver Davies *pf*
Meridian © CDE84659 (72' • DDD)



How many student cellists have fallen in love, despite themselves, with the

studies of Alfredo Piatti? It's not that they're easy; if the works collected here prove anything, it's precisely why Piatti (1822-1901) was known as 'the Paganini of the cello'. It's more that, for all his virtuoso wizardry, Piatti (who inspired Verdi to write the cello solo in the prelude to *I masnadieri*) had such a gloriously songful sensibility – perhaps unsurprisingly for a cellist raised in the opera house of his native Bergamo, who counted Donizetti as a family friend.

This is Adrian Bradbury's second disc of Piatti's operatic fantasies and as usual with this repertoire a little goes a long way, though there's no disputing that Piatti can spin an altogether superior class of tinsel. With the inclusion of the expansive, 16-minute *Rimembranze del Trovatore* (and just wait until you hear what Piatti does

with 'Stride la vampa'), this is probably the disc with most appeal to non-specialists. Piatti crowns the *Lucia di Lammermoor* variations with eerie, whistling harmonics, and the cello makes a properly dramatic entrance in the *Souvenir de Linda di Chamounix*.

Bradbury is wholly alive to these touches of colour and character, as is Oliver Davies (who made the piano reductions of several of the works recorded here). His interpretations have a red-blooded, horsehair-and-rosin quality that gives them the immediacy of a live performance, nicely capturing the physical thrill of Piatti's often spectacular fireworks as well as the wholly fitting *bel canto* warmth of Bradbury's more lyrical playing. The booklet notes, also by Bradbury, are excellent: if this is the sort of thing you like, you won't find it done with more conviction.

Richard Bratby

N Pinnock

Lines and Spaces^a. Music for Europe^b.

String Quartet No 2^c. Words^d

^aOmar Ebrahim *bar* ^aRichard Uttley *pf*

^cBozzini Quartet; ^bEnsemble Adapter;

^dLondon Sinfonietta / Beat Furrer

Wergo © WER6431-2 (53' • DDD)



The arresting output of Naomi Pinnock (*b*1979) has not received much

exposure in the UK (the Huddersfield Festival excepted), so it is not surprising it fell to Wergo to issue this first release devoted to her work as part of its long-running Edition Zeitgenössische Musik series.

The two movements of the Second Quartet (2012) contrast in various ways, not least those trenchant chordal gestures of the first – its 'I retrace your steps' subtitle evoked by gradual falling away then sudden renewal of tension, heading seamlessly into the inward rumination and halting silence of its successor. That this is music intent on forging its own continuity is confirmed in *Words* (2011), where the composer's abstract phrases are intoned by the soloist such that they complement the instrumental writing without seeking any more explicit goal.

Lines and Spaces (2015) alternates between three expansive and ethereal 'space' pieces with three succinct and repetitive 'line' pieces in a sequence whose whole is audibly more than the sum of its parts. Both formal and

expressive emphases seem more unequally placed in *Music for Europe* (2016), the alluring sonorities of this latter-day broken consort thrown into relief by the breathy resonance of even-numbered pieces whose 'porous without loss' subtitle aptly indicates their function as interludes within the overall sequence of introspective elegance.

No reservations concerning the quality of the performances, the crisply defined recording or the detailed annotations. A pity the ensemble piece *Four Humours* was not also included, but this can be downloaded from NMC and, like the present disc, is well recommended.

Richard Whitehouse

Prokofiev • Rachmaninov

'Russian Cello Sonatas'

Prokofiev Cello Sonata, Op 119 Rachmaninov

Cello Sonata, Op 19. Vocalise, Op 34 No 14

Hee-Young Lim *vc* Nathalia Milstein *pf*

Sony Classical © 80358 11849-7 (68' • DDD)



Old-school musicologists may scoff but these exceptionally melodic

sonatas are now among the most frequently played of their kind. Not that they are without flaw. Rachmaninov's Cello Sonata, in which the piano is rarely content with mere accompanying, can sound over-egged. Go to Alisa Weilerstein and Inon Barnatan (Decca, 11/15) to hear it presented with all guns blazing. While Hee-Young Lim insists that she plays 'from the heart', the results suggest that she and Nathalia Milstein are also thinkers, finding a fresh balance of formality, vulnerability and resilience throughout the programme.

Prokofiev's score is uncomplicated only on the surface. Dazzlingly conceived for the solo instrument at a time of disaster both personal and political, it bears a Soviet-friendly tag, 'Man! That has a proud sound', yet responds well to more equivocal treatment. Lim and Milstein take us on a suitably mysterious journey even with the cello closely scrutinised. Michael Fine's relatively intimate sound stage arguably suits the understatement of the music-making. Fortunately Lim's low-lying opening statement is tonally resplendent, poetically shaped and perfectly in tune (a rarity). The pair's guarded launch of the second movement promises to take Prokofiev's incorrigible jauntiness in a less blatant direction.

The Rachmaninov Sonata elicits just enough soulful questioning from Lim,

who chose the composer's judicious 1929 recording of his own Second Piano Concerto as ideal lockdown listening in a recent *Gramophone* survey. Milstein similarly avoids an excess of keyboard clamour. Her debut solo recital (Mirare, 6/18) was Prokofiev-heavy but, working in collaboration, she is well advised to dazzle discreetly. Thus Rachmaninov's stormy *Allegro scherzando* is less febrile than usual, at times almost Gallic. The pianist is given a real chance to shine in the slow movement, where the instrument introduces the main theme before the cello is allowed to take over. Here once again finesse trumps any temptation to gush. I should mention that the first-movement exposition repeat is observed.

There are of course abundant recorded recitals offering the same two pieces, Rachmaninov's *Vocalise* and more. Captured in 2006, Erato rivals Gautier Capuçon and Gabriela Montero go for a grander lyrical sweep in what sounds like a bigger, emptier auditorium. Rostropovich's classic accounts, self-recommending for some, are hampered by 1950s mono. The claims of Lim and Milstein are enhanced by classy packaging: there are photographs of these personable young performers, not too many, plus a helpful explanatory note from Tully Potter

taking in observations from the cellist. Try dipping a toe in the water with their *Vocalise*, typically unaffected and elegant.

David Gutman

Selected comparisons:

Rostropovich, Dedyukhin (12/67^R) or Richter (11/73^R)

(ALTO) ALC1373

G Capuçon, Montero (2/08) (ERAT) 385786-2

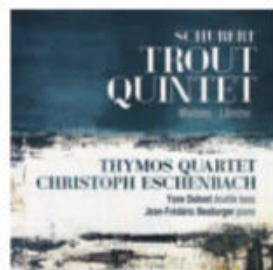
Schubert

Piano Quintet, 'Trout', D667^a. Ländler (from D366 & 790)^b. Waltzes (arr Dejours from D146)^c

^{ab}Yann Dubost ^{db}Christoph Eschenbach,

^cJean-Frédéric Neuburger ^{pf}^{ab}Thymos Quartet

Avie Ⓢ AV2416 (55' • DDD)



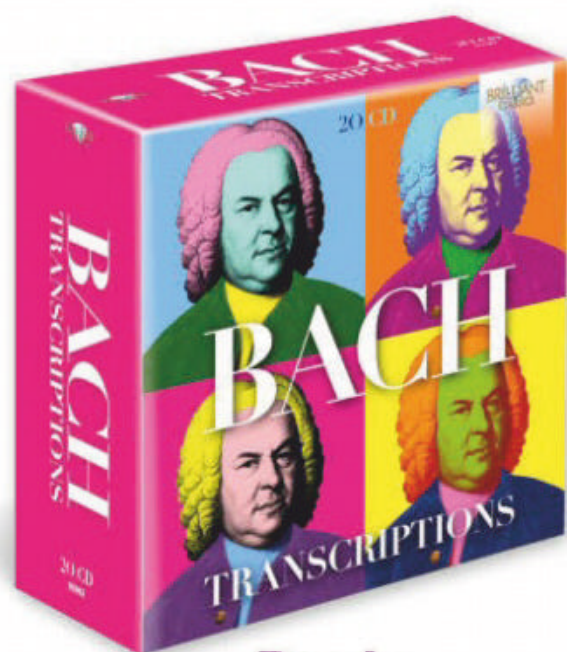
Christoph Eschenbach and the Thymos Quartet had me smiling from the very first bars of Schubert's *Trout* Quintet. How affectionately they lean on the gentle leading tones, and how subtly they shade the subsequent (and surprising) harmonic shifts. It's a performance teeming with delightful incident right the way through, in fact, yet such consistent attention to detail never precludes expansive phrasing or inhibits burbling rhythmic vivacity. The *Andante*'s relaxed,

tender atmosphere is a raptly sustained idyll – that astonishing lift from G to A flat (after the fermata at 3'45'') feels like stepping through a secret door – and the Scherzo's repeated notes are akin to mirthful laughter. The fourth movement can be bit of a slog in some performances, but not this one, which is vividly characterised. I'm especially grateful that Eschenbach's shapely and feather-light playing in the third variation has nothing remotely étude-like about it.

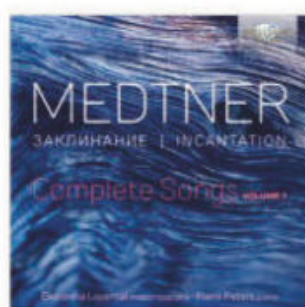
If only Avie had given us more of Eschenbach, whose supple rubato sounds utterly natural. By contrast, Jean-Frédéric Neuburger's playing in a brief selection of Ländler seems studied and slightly awkward. Thankfully, the Thymos's reading of excerpts from a substantial set of waltzes, D146, proves far more satisfying. Not only is the playing itself enchanting but Olivier Dejour's string quintet arrangement abounds with felicities while remaining true to the piano originals. Listen at 3'09'', for instance, where Dejours artfully introduces pizzicato to the texture, preparing the ear for a predominantly pizzicato treatment of the next waltz. It's seven minutes of *gemütlich* bliss, and icing on the cake for one of the most delectable performances of the *Trout* Quintet on record. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

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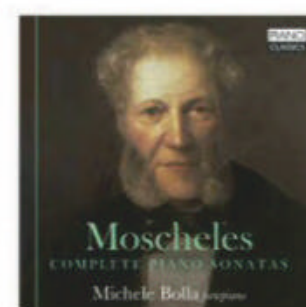
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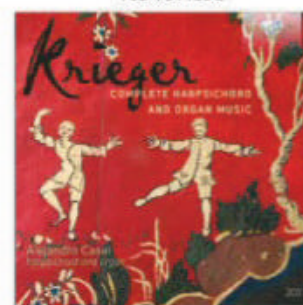
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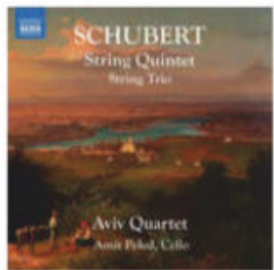
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Schubert

String Trio, D581. String Quintet, D956^a

Aviv Quartet with ^aAmit Peled vc

Naxos ® 8 573891 (79' • DDD)



Why did the string trio of violin, viola and cello never really catch on as a genre? Mozart,

having written the defining work (K563), promptly abandoned it for other forms. Beethoven contributed a handful of trios but could not decide whether to follow the dance-imbued divertimento form of Mozart (in Op 3) or the four-movement symphonic form of his own quartets (Op 9). Haydn, the chamber composer par excellence, gave the form one try – very early in his career, among a series of works for the older combination of two violins and cello – before adding back the viola and creating the earliest quartet masterpieces. It would appear to require a particular temperament to conceive of a satisfying fullness of tone within the confines of just the three instruments of different ranges.

Schubert had a couple of goes before finding his feet in D581 from 1817. It's audibly not a work of Schubert's full maturity but he inhabits the form completely, offering music that gives all three instruments something worthwhile to do, while never sounding like a cut-rate quartet with something important missing. The Aviv Quartet (minus second violinist Philippe Villafranca) give a well-observed and considered reading, making just about the best possible case for this often ignored work.

The same observance of the subtleties of the score carries over into the Quintet, for which the Aviv Quartet are joined by the Israeli-American cellist Amit Peled. Everything is in the right place, intonation is by and large spot-on and no marking passes by without having some effect on what we hear. It's a beautiful performance in many ways. What is missing, though, is the sense of the wildness heard on, say, the Pavel Haas Quartet's *Gramophone* Award-winning disc, which palpably conveys the horrors the 31-year-old composer must have suffered during the last months of his life, as illness ravaged his body and mind. Schubert's Quintet is one of the most harrowing masterworks in the chamber repertoire. Here the dying of the light feels as if it is being accepted with too little rage.

David Threasher

String Quintet – selected comparison:

Pavel Haas Qt, *Ishizaka* (10/13) (SUPR) SU4110-2

'Barricades'

d'Anglebert Suite No 3 Charpentier Chaconne 'sans frayeur ...' F Couperin L'art de toucher le clavecin – Prélude No 1. Pièces de clavecin – Les barricades mystérieuses; Le Dodo ou L'amour au berceau; La Ménétou Forqueray Jupiter. Pièces de viole – La Sylva. Suite No 1 – La Portugaise Lambert Mes jours s'en vont finir Marais La Reveuse. Les voix humaines Rameau Les fêtes d'Hébé – Je vous revois ... Sans cesse les oiseaux font retentir Visée Suite in D minor

Jean Rondeau hpd Thomas Dunford archlute

with Lea Desandre mez Marc Mauillon bar

Myriam Rignol va da gamba

Erato ® 9029 52699-5 (69' • DDD)



If you're the sort who likes to know exactly what's going on, you may well

find this album frustrating. What the lutenist Thomas Dunford and harpsichordist Jean Rondeau have done is to serve up a selection of French Baroque chamber works, most of them originally for solo lute (eg de Visée), harpsichord (Couperin, d'Anglebert) or even bass viol (Marais), and perform them as duos. No such arrangements exist (at least, as far as I know), and no coherent explanation is offered, so one assumes they are semi-improvised. Free improvisation is certainly well within the capability of these two excellent musicians but here they tend to stick closely to the written progress of the music, with the fantasy coming from the way they share out the melodic and accompanimental roles between them, swapping over sometimes for a whole piece, sometimes between phrases, sometimes cutting loose with a quick counter-phrase and sometimes joining together in a sudden joyous unison.

If that sounds naughty of them, the results justify the means; the links between the lute and harpsichord repertoires were close during the French Baroque, and the whole exercise sounds perfectly natural. Court composers such as Couperin, Marais and de Visée would have known each other well, and it is not hard to imagine them getting together in impromptu ensembles of this kind to please the king of an evening.

Though still both around 30, Dunford and Rondeau are already steeped in this rich and subtle repertoire, and play it like they own it – which is perhaps why they feel able to let Couperin's Dodo fall sleepily from his perch at the finish. Both

also like to indulge some slowish tempos, but Dunford's way with a piece like Marais's *Les voix humaines* captivates with its intense tenderness, while Rondeau has a habit of placing every note with immensely satisfying rightness, sweetness and precision. They invite guest musicians to their friendly soirée too, all of whom add to the pleasure. Did the Roi Soleil ever ask for programme notes, I wonder?

Lindsay Kemp

'La Bellezza'

'The Beauty of 17th Century Violin Music'

Bertali Ciaccona HIF Biber Partia V Buxtehude Sonata a 2, BuxWV272 Cima Sonata seconda Falconieri Follias echa para mi Señora Doña Tarolilla de Carallenos Marini Sonata sopra la Mónica Matteis Alia fantasia Schmelzer Sonata quarta Uccellini Aria sopra la Bergamasca Weichlein Partia III Westhoff Imitatione de liuto Musica Alchemica / Lina Tur Bonet vn/va d'amore Pan Classics ® PC10408 (68' • DDD)



'The Beauty of 17th Century Violin Music' is Lina Tur Bonet's

subtitle for this new release with her ensemble Musica Alchemica, and who would argue against that as a thing worth celebrating? And if it also suggests that the mixture of Italian and Austrian repertoire is a purely subjective choice on Bonet's part, who would want to deny her that, given the degree to which she has poured her personality into her previous releases, not least her forcefully dramatic Biber *Mystery Sonatas* (Pan Classics, 10/15) and a flamboyant Corelli Op 5?

The disc opens with the shimmering arpeggios of a solo Fantasia by Matteis the Younger; but apart from a short, lute-imitating pizzicato piece by Westhoff, the rest is ensemble music ranging from sonatas for violin and continuo by Cima and Schmelzer to typically rich Austrian five-part music in Weichlein's *Partia III*. In between there are trio sonatas by Marini, Falconieri, Biber, Buxtehude, Bertali and Uccellini (the last two with violas d'amore substituting for violins). Underlying much of the music is an apparent fascination with ground basses – eight of them here, in 11 pieces – but the styles and atmospheres are varied too, from the coursing energy of Marini to the calming grace of Cima, and from the restless moods of Bertali's *Ciaccona*,



A balance of vulnerability and resilience: the cellist Hee-Young Lim and pianist Nathalia Milstein play sonatas by Prokofiev and Rachmaninov – see review on page 50

slowly gathering and losing speed like a train journey through a varied landscape, to the dark *scordatura* colourings and weighty bass accumulations of the Biber.

Bonet and her musicians capture it all: the lightness and gravity, the wit and the seriousness, the ardency and the soul. The sounds they make are indeed beautiful and rich in tone, and there are interpretative details at every turn, not one of which seems without genuine expressive purpose. The contributions of the continuo section of lute, harp and keyboards are busy but not overbearing, and a double bass is an inspired addition for the Biber. Bonet's honest and heartfelt music-making means that new releases from her are becoming things to look forward to.

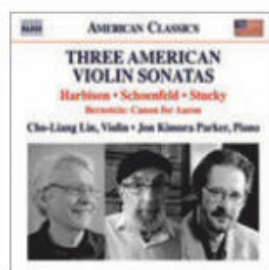
Lindsay Kemp

'Three American Violin Sonatas'

Bernstein Canon for Aaron Harbison Violin Sonata No 1 Schoenfeld Violin Sonata Stucky Violin Sonata

Cho-Liang Lin *vn* Jon Kimura Parker *pf*

Naxos American Classics © 8 559888 (60' • DDD)



On the evidence of this disc, the violin sonata is alive and kicking in 21st-century America. The form has a fine history in the United States, with examples by Copland (1943), Harris (1942), Mennin (1956), Piston (1939) and Ives (four, 1902-16). Bernstein penned a sonata very early in his career (in 1939!) but is represented here by his brief *Canon for Aaron* (composed in 1970 to mark Copland's 70th birthday). The three featured sonatas are all of more recent provenance and, moreover, were written at the behest of the violinist Cho-Liang Lin.

Paul Schoenfeld's Sonata (2009) is the earliest and largest of the three, stylistically something of a mash-up, its four movements revealing very different inspirations and even dates of origin (the third, 'Romanza', for example, is based on an unfinished piece from his teens in the 1960s). The opening 'Vanishing Point' derives its structure from David Markson's

novel of the same name, the concluding 'Freilach' (Yiddish for 'a joyous song or dance') from Eastern European folk models. Its heart, though, is the Intermezzo, the grave beauty – and compositional subtlety – of which belies the rather inconsequential title.

Steven Stucky's Sonata (2013) is a late work, written three years before his death. There is a rival recording from Nicholas DiEugenio and Mimi Solomon (New Focus) which I have not heard, running some 90 seconds longer overall. A concentrated, often thorny work, it was inspired at several removes by Debussy's, written at an equivalent moment in his career. Despite the marking, much of the opening *Calmo* is anything but, but the scherzo finale sparkles. It is, nonetheless, a more straightforward listen than John Harbison's stark, lean, tonally ambiguous First Sonata (2011), constructed – but not sounding – like a Baroque suite. Lin and Kimura Parker make a sympathetic partnership, performing each work as well as one could hope. Fine sound.

Guy Rickards

Youri Egorov

Tim Parry recalls the short but eventful life of a Russian pianist who was perhaps his own worst enemy, yet whose legacy includes a handful of timeless recordings

There is a special place in pianistic history for outliers who capture widespread support at competitions without ultimately winning over the jury. At the 1977 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition the firm audience favourite was 23-year-old Youri Egorov, although South African Steven De Groote emerged as the winner. When Egorov was not even placed among the finalists (owing, some felt, to a politically motivated low score from the Soviet judge, Nikolai Petrov), a collection was arranged among his enthusiastic supporters, including benefactors and board members of the competition, raising \$10,000, equal to the first prize award, in order to finance a first New York appearance. He was taken under the wing of the influential impresario Maxim Gershunoff, who arranged a series of high-profile concerts culminating in Egorov's Carnegie Hall debut in December 1978.

Another special place in pianistic history is reserved for those whose blazing talents are cruelly snuffed out by their early death – a long and illustrious list that includes Dinu Lipatti, William Kapell and Terence Judd. Egorov, like Lipatti, died at the age of 33, and like Lipatti he gave concerts fully aware of the limited time left to him.

Egorov was born on May 28, 1954, in Kazan – a city about 450 miles east of Moscow renowned for its vibrant mix of Russian and Oriental cultures. His parents were teachers, his mother of maths, his father of geography, and like his two brothers, he studied at the Kazan Conservatory from the age of six. At the age of 17 he went to study with the celebrated Soviet pianist Yakov Zak at the Moscow Conservatory, where he remained for five years. During this period he won third prizes at both the 1974 International Tchaikovsky Competition and the 1975 Queen Elisabeth Competition, before defecting to the West in 1976. Wider fame still awaited him.

There are few versions of the Debussy Préludes that so convince you that this music really matters

Egorov's stated reasons for leaving the USSR were, as for so many before him, the desire for greater artistic and personal freedom, yet as someone who experienced personal brutality in Moscow he was for the most part fearful of the legal and social ramifications of his homosexuality. When he was sent to give concerts in Italy in May 1976, he managed to escape his supervisors and sought political asylum. He spent almost a month in an Italian refugee camp, during which time Zak bore the brunt of explaining his non-return to Moscow. Zak died in June, which compounded Egorov's difficulties with a sense of

guilt. Egorov was eventually sent to Belgium, from where he made his way to the Netherlands. In Amsterdam, at the age of 22, he met the architect Jan Brouwer (1947-88), who became his lifetime partner.

Egorov embraced the atmosphere and culture of 1980s Amsterdam with open arms. Whether his party lifestyle and penchant for alcohol and drug use contributed to a certain fallibility in his playing – including memory lapses in concerto performances – is an open question. Certainly, a headlong indulgence in just about every conceivable vice contributed to the intensity of his short life. Egorov did

not believe that he would grow old, and in a manner tragically self-fulfilling he lived his life accordingly. He contracted Aids and died on April 16, 1988. Although his death was widely reported as being from the consequences of this disease – and to an extent this was true – in fact, as his condition deteriorated, he took matters into his own hands. With the precise time of his death (7pm) chosen to coincide with the hour of his birth, a peaceful day with close friends concluded with his euthanasia. Brouwer followed him to the grave – literally: they are buried together – that August.

For all the chaotic details of Egorov's life, his posthumous reputation rests

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1960 – *Enters the Kazan Conservatory, aged six*

Egorov enters his local music school, and from 1965 studies with Irina Dubinina, a former student of Yakov Zak and Lev Oborin.

• 1971 – *Studies begin at the Moscow Conservatory*

Egorov works for five years with the eminent pianist Yakov Zak.

• 1976 – *Defects to the West*

After escaping his minders in Rome, Egorov settles in Amsterdam.

• 1977 – *Impresses at the Van Cliburn competition*

His passionate playing wins over the audience if not the jury.

• 1978 – *Makes his first recording for EMI*

After successful debuts in New York and Chicago, Egorov records Schumann for EMI; he embarks on what one critic has since rather harshly described as 'one of the great five-year careers in piano history'.

• 1983 – *Records Debussy's Préludes*

Egorov's EMI recording of Debussy is one of his lasting legacies.

• 1986 – *Final concert appearance in America*

After this, Egorov continues to give concerts in Europe; despite declining health he carries on playing with fearless resolve and personality, dying tragically early at the age of 33, in 1988.



on his recordings – a small but treasurable legacy that reveals his poetic depth and range of interpretative vision. Following his New York debut at Alice Tully Hall in January 1978, some of that city's most hard-nosed critics resorted to exalted comparisons – Horowitz, Richter, Rachmaninov – and EMI invited him to make a solo disc. The immediate result was a stunning Schumann *Kreisleriana*, a phantasmagorical account that ranges from the demonic to the touchingly vulnerable; the longer-term outcome was a four-year contract that precariously secured Egorov's place in the pantheon of young pianists.

Schumann was perfectly suited to Egorov's temperament, the volatile sense of fantasy and whimsical shifts of mood caught with ravishing voicings, mesmerising legato, subtle pedalling and huge reserves of tonal power. A mercurial *Carnaval* from the Queen Elisabeth Competition, issued on a DG LP, gave a hint of what was to come. A 1979 recording of the C major *Fantasia* for a Dutch branch of EMI (now on Globe) was bettered a year later by a blistering live account

from Pasadena, California (now available on First Hand Records, 7/16). This recital also includes Chopin's Op 25 Études – not flawless (the 'Butterfly' comes spectacularly off the rails, which is always a risk), but burnished and poetic, and deeply communicative. More Chopin and Schumann followed for EMI, not always with the best sound, before in 1983 Egorov made what some consider his finest recording: the two books of Debussy's *Préludes* (10/84). There are more obviously immaculate and glittering versions, but few that so convince you that this music really matters. Try the utter desolation of 'Des pas sur la neige' – this isn't playing designed for competition success.

To say there was a steady decline from that point would be simplistic and misleading. An Abbey Road recording of Mozart concertos from 1985, Egorov's final outing on EMI, suggests to me at least a degree of emotional detachment hardly associated with his earlier playing, yet hearing his plangent but uncompromising Schubert *Moments musicaux* from November 1987, when he was already seriously ill, is a deeply moving experience.

Egorov recorded relatively little Russian music. This has nothing to do with temperamental predisposition – his live Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev and Shostakovich attest to that – but it does illustrate the extent to which, unlike some of his compatriots, he escaped being typecast in Russian repertoire. An early pointer can be found in a recording of Bach from September 1975. The B minor Prelude and

Fugue from Book 1 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* are taken impossibly slowly (slower even than Richter), yet phrased with a logic and refinement that builds an impression of a cathedral in sound. What might at first seem like austere self-denial gives way to a visionary quality: one hesitates to invoke spiritual transcendence, notwithstanding the resonance of this tonality in Bach, but Egorov transports you. His playing has one quality that is impossible to teach: it has soul. ⑥

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Schumann *Kreisleriana* Yuri Egorov *pf*
Warner Classics (7/79)

It's a toss-up between his Schumann and his Debussy, but Egorov's *Kreisleriana* (recorded in April 1978 and featured on his first EMI disc) captures everything that excited people about his playing, including its youthful impetuosity.

Instrumental



Patrick Rucker enjoys a seductively poetic Schumann recital:

'In Waldszenen, one is immediately struck by the precision, warmth and limpid clarity of Fejérvári's conception' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 60](#)



Harriet Smith hears Mari Kodama's album of Beethoven arrangements:

'The art of a fine transcription is to make it sound as comfortable in its new guise as in the original' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 62](#)

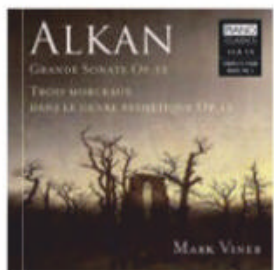
Alkan

Grande Sonate, 'Les quatre âges', Op 33.

Souvenirs: Trois Morceaux dans le genre pathétique, Op 15

Mark Viner *pf*

Piano Classics © PCL10209 (67' • DDD)



Did you know that for the entire era of 78rpm shellac discs (that's to say from the

late 1890s to the mid-1950s), not a single piece by Alkan was recorded? And, so far as I know, only four piano rolls – one of which, played by Harold Bauer, featured 'Le vent', the penultimate track here.

Things have improved since then and Alkan has slowly been claiming his rightful place among the great composer-pianists, but it takes a certain kind of temperament and a superior finger technique to take him on. Those who cut the mustard are few and far between. Mark Viner is such a one and with this, the third volume of what will form the complete works, he can claim a place at the top table as one of the pre-eminent Alkan players *de nos jours*.

The extraordinary *Grande Sonate* (known as *Les quatre âges* – though not Alkan's title) is the only work of the genre in which the four movements get progressively slower in tempo. It opens with a movement headed '20 ans: Très vite'. Viner is *extrêmement vite*, even *plus vite que* Marc-André Hamelin (and that's saying something) with the devilish umcha-umchas of the left hand dispatched as though they were single notes instead of leaping tenths. But speed is not all here. The successful executant must have a twinkle in the eye and a touch of mischief. Another tick. Viner describes the second movement ('30 ans: Quasi-Faust') as 'eleven and a half of the most terrifyingly difficult minutes in the entire piano literature'. They are also among the most thrilling to hear – especially when played like this. The third and fourth movements ('40 ans' and '50 ans') hold you in suspense until Alkan, in a

typically cruel gesture, suddenly slams the coffin lid shut.

The *Trois Morceaux* that follow are almost as quirky and capricious. Alkan provides no expression marks of any kind, so the pianist must search out 'what is instinctively right rather than yielding to the demands of the composer' (Viner again in his own first-rate booklet essay). 'Aime-moi' is a substantial (9'41") quasi-ballade with some passages that Ronald Smith famously described as having been 'written for an extinct race of seven-fingered pianists'. No 2, 'Le vent' (see above), was very much in vogue a century ago but is seldom heard at all today. Its relentless runs of chromatic semiquavers are nailed by Viner with envy-making fluency and ease. Finally (and aptly) comes 'Morte': the 'Dies irae' theme, desolation, violent eruptions – audacious, unsettling, modern. And this was an early work.

Viner, like the young Hamelin, ploughs his own furrow. His day is yet to come, but come it surely will. And whether or not you care for Alkan's music, here is a disc of piano-playing out of the top drawer.

Jeremy Nicholas

Grande Sonate – selected comparison:

Hamelin (12/95) (HYPE) CDA66794

Souvenirs – selected comparison:

Hamelin (9/01) (HYPE) CDA67218

JS Bach

Das wohltemperirte Clavier – Book 1, BWV846-869

Trevor Pinnock *hpd*

DG ④ 483 8436GH2 (118' • DDD)



Because Trevor Pinnock's solo harpsichord forays are few and far between

these days, it's easy to forget just what a superb player he was, and still is, judging from his first complete recording of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* Book 1. In a press release Pinnock cited the singing quality of his instrument, modelled after the Franco-

German builder Henri Hemsch, along with the registral clarity that allows Bach's part-writing its due. He's absolutely right. The close-lying lines in the C major and A minor Fugues register with total success, for example. Nor do the C minor, C sharp, G major and B flat Preludes' busy textures blur, although one misses the colourful timbral variety inherent in the late Kenneth Gilbert's recording (Archiv, 9/84). Even Pinnock's occasional use of octave couplings (the B flat major Fugue) sounds discreetly effective and not heavily upholstered.

What is more, Pinnock is a direct and straightforward player. He avoids the exaggerated articulation and agogic mannerisms that way too many period-instrument practitioners deem stylish. Listen to the subtle lift in the C minor and E major Fugue subjects, the conversational give-and-take of the C sharp minor Prelude's phrase-shaping or the way the D major Prelude's motoric right-hand lines manage to convey a sense of air in between the notes. The latter applies to Pinnock's gently jaunty A flat major Prelude as well. There's a sense of line in the G sharp minor Fugue subject's repeated notes that's easier to conceive than to execute.

Pinnock particularly shines when he imbues a Prelude and Fugue coupling with distinctive characters. A good example of this can be found in his laid-back yet winsomely pointed A major Prelude, which is followed by a brashly upbeat reading of the Fugue in the same key. The F sharp minor Prelude emerges less like a keyboard exercise and more like a dance movement, just as the *ricercare*-like nature of its companion Fugue in the same key inspires a vocally informed interpretation.

Knowing Pinnock's sensitive and involving traversals of the *Goldberg Variations'* minor-key movements, the *Italian Concerto's Adagio* and the spacious Sarabandes from his second and superior recording of the Partitas, I expected more from Book 1's monumental pieces. The E flat major Prelude and Fugue are surprisingly sober and matter-of-fact,



Direct Bach: Trevor Pinnock brings a wealth of experience to his recording of Book 1 of The Well-Tempered Clavier

while I've rarely heard such a clunky rendition of the sublime B flat minor Prelude, together with Pinnock's ponderously dispatched C sharp minor and B minor Fugues. For this reason, my harpsichord Book 1 first choices remain the aforementioned Gilbert, the warmth of spontaneity of Céline Frisch's edition (Alpha, 4/16) and the hard-to-source yet profoundly rewarding Blandine Verlet (Naïve) and Davitt Moroney (Harmonia Mundi, 4/89). Still, Pinnock's best work deserves respect and attention, and if Book 2 looms on the horizon, I hope I'll be here to listen. **Jed Distler**

Barmotin

Twenty Preludes, Op 12.

Tema con variazioni, Op 1

Christopher Williams *pf*

Grand Piano © GP799 (78' • DDD)



Not just his music but even the name Semyon Barmotin (1877-1939)

languished for decades in obscurity, Gérard Hugon's booklet note acknowledging the circumstances and even place of his death as remaining a mystery. His earlier years were auspicious, this pupil of Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov writing several notable chamber and piano works published by the like of Belaieff and Jürgenson. As his Op 1, *Tema con variazioni* (1904) was clearly a statement of intent – an almost half-hour sequence on a theme whose formal intricacy yields numerous melodic motifs which the 12 ensuing variations explore via waltz and mazurka, an eloquently wrought *Andante* then on to the finale, whose martial undertow ensures a powerful resolution.

Exactly why Barmotin excluded two keys (F and B) from, and only indirectly referred to two others (E flat minor and A minor) in his Twenty Preludes (1910) is unclear but these four books of five pieces still evince a wide variety of expression in pianism that, less refined than Scriabin or less soulful than Rachmaninov, feels nothing if not idiomatically conceived. Listeners and pianists alike should try No 4, its content alternately brooding

and passionate; No 8, whose harmonic subtlety veers towards late Brahms; No 13, imbued with undertones of Orthodox chant; and No 19, its *tristezza* marking suggestive of pensive emotion only just concealed.

This music requires advocacy such as it finds in Christopher Williams, probing its personality as surely as its technical mastery, his Steinway D accorded sound of realism and perspective. Hugon mentions a 'remarkable' Sonata from 1906 as well as a 'notable' *Poème symphonique* from 1930. For now, these premiere recordings of Barmotin are certainly worth investigating.

Richard Whitehouse

Bersa

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Goran Filipec *pf*

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The works featured on Grand Piano's second volume of piano music by the prolific and

multifaceted Croatian composer Blagoje Bersa (1873-1934) often prove as colourful and unabashedly virtuoso as those on the previous volume (3/18), if hardly as substantial, musically speaking.

Bersa's Ballade in D minor seemingly fuses the 'rocking horse' rhythm of Chopin's Third Ballade with the populist side of Spanish Impressionism. If the Rondo-Polonaise's inspiration rarely rises beyond its predictable sequential patterns, it's hard to resist the music's infectious energy, especially through Goran Filipec's powerful and irrepressible fingers.

The early Valse in A major, Op 3, channels Johann Strauss II's multi-thematic works in this genre but without truly memorable melodies. By contrast, the pithy main theme of the *Valse mélancolique*, Op 76, is hard to forget once you've heard it. It took me a while to aurally link the attractive and fluent *Tema con variazioni* with the harmonic scheme of the concluding variation movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No 30. On the other hand, listeners familiar with Mozart's C minor Sonata, K457, will discover its major-key iteration via Bersa's own Sonata. Among this collection's myriad shorter works, I'm most drawn to the *Bizarra serenada*'s quirky harmonic shifts, the *Fantasia breve*'s brooding intensity and *An Old Sailor's Telling*'s mournful aura.

Although listeners curious about Bersa should first investigate the altogether stronger compositions featured on Vol 1, Filipec's masterful advocacy deserves the highest praise, and so do his informative booklet annotations. **Jed Distler**

F Couperin

'L'Alchimiste: The Complete Works for Harpsichord, Vol 2 - Les années de jeunesse' Pièces de clavecin, première livre - premier ordre; second ordre. Messe 'propre pour les couvents de religieux et religieuses'. Messe 'à l'usage des paroisses'

Bertrand Cuiller hpd with Jean-Luc Ho org

Les Meslanges

Harmonia Mundi ® ③ HMM90 2377/9 (3h 15' • DDD)



Normally, when I have a good feeling about a recording from an initial dip my

admiration grows with repeated listening and digging into its background. But with Bertrand Cuiller's latest volume, it's the opposite, because I've grown increasingly frustrated and suspicious, not so much of the quality of performance as of the 'idea'.

As the title and notes – including Cuiller's own blurb in the booklet – suggest, this is a series for which the concept seems to be almost as important as the content. Starting with 'alchimiste'. An interview with Cuiller on France Musique brought me no closer to understanding the idea. It certainly seems to have nothing to do with the proper meaning of turning base metal into gold or some other transmutation of matter. And the flowery notes of the first volume (not by the artist) have only one mention of alchemy – in relation to Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* (an early modern emblem book). This, Cuiller's interview and his highly fantastical synaesthetic attitude to shuffling Couperin's *ordres*, as well as his repeated references to a 'voyage imaginaire', made me wonder if his alchemist is in fact more to do with the new-age novel of that title by Paulo Coelho, which to many young people of my (and Cuiller's) generation became the literary equivalent of a hallucinogenic trip.

None of which is helpful. Fortunately the Frenchman's skills at the harpsichord are not in doubt, and he demonstrates great sensitivity to the stylistic and formal properties of Couperin's musical world. For Vol 2 he performs the first two *ordres* from the first *livre* (there are four books, containing 27 *ordres* and over 200 pieces). These are among the longest of Couperin's *ordres*, each comprising a set of traditional dances followed by a series of character pieces. Cuiller is particularly convincing in the livelier dances and in the more majestic numbers; he is spirited yet never rushed, allowing each piece to unfold in a natural yet forward flow. Unlike most other surveys, he is sticking, for now at least, to just one instrument – a copy of an anonymous 17th-century harpsichord. The sound is not short of presence and weight, and hence in the slower numbers the enigmatic, elegiac longing normally associated with Couperin is less abundant than with Scott Ross, Laurence Boulay (both Erato) and even Blandine Verlet (Naïve), while Olivier Baumont (Erato) and Davitt Moroney (Harmonia Mundi) bring a finer-tuned gracefulness and elegance. And to get an idea of what may have inspired Couperin's idiosyncratic titles, the notes to the recent reissue of Baumont's survey (1/19) are much more helpful than those to either of Cuiller's

volumes. Apart from the somewhat clunky translation, the notes to Cuiller's latest disc are mainly concerned with the two organ Masses.

Which brings me to the second conceptual problem – the balance in the programming. In the first volume of his 'intégrale', Cuiller had mentioned the special feature of his survey, which supplements the harpsichord music with other works of Couperin. That volume didn't deliver on the promise and was entirely made up of harpsichord *ordres* (supposedly assembled according to the theme of theatre). The second volume over-compensates by assigning more than half of the recording time to Couperin's early organ Masses. Despite the pleasure of hearing the two fabulous historic instruments from Notre-Dame de Juvigny (1662-63) and Abbaye de Saint-Michel-en-Thiérache (1714), the sheer weight of the repertoire overshadows the harpsichord pieces.

Not that such masterful performances of these substantial Masses are unwelcome, and they are presented, as would have been the norm at the time of Couperin, in alternation with plainchant. The director of Les Meslanges provides some interesting explanations regarding the choice of chants and their Latin pronunciation. Organist Jean-Luc Ho takes the challenges of these works head-on: from registrations as indicated by the composer to ornamentation and phrasing not so indicated. There is exuberance and intimacy in his musicianship without any trace of self-indulgence or pseudo-grandeur.

The theme of this volume, 'Les années de jeunesse', in fact only applies to these organ works, which Couperin composed five years after taking up the 'throne' of Saint-Gervais at the age of 17 (the first harpsichord *livre* dates from 23 years later – hardly youthful years). This is another reason to consider the organ works to be the main star of what has been understood to be a survey of Couperin's works for harpsichord. Presumably future volumes will return to the harpsichord-focused repertoire of the first. **Michelle Assay**

Kabalevsky

Complete Preludes

Michael Korstick pf

CPO ® CPO555 272-2 (76' • DDD)



Once upon a time Dmitry Kabalevsky enjoyed a place on the fourth pedestal of

Soviet composers alongside Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Khachaturian. Nowadays this position seems less secure but there's still a place of honour for his contribution towards music education, rather more so than for the artistic value of his compositional output. This is the case, for instance, of the Six Preludes and Fugues, Op 61, which were designed to introduce young pianists to the world of polyphony. They range from Shostakovich-imitation to artless pioneer (Soviet youth) music in the spirit of a May Day children's parade. The title of the fourth one, 'At the Young Pioneer Summer Camp', leaves little to imagination. Michael Korstick's performance matches the music in its directness. But why such muscular aggression? Are these children on steroids?

Musically the 24 Preludes, Op 38, are, at their best, Mussorgsky-lite meets Prokofiev-lite. Based on Russian folk melodies, in the hands of the right pianist these could be pleasant enough miniatures. But Korstick is certainly not the right person for the job. His merciless bashing in the more dramatic numbers and his apparent lack of affection for any of the lyrical ones make the disc a tough listen. If you want to give Kabalevsky a chance, go directly to Horowitz's live recording of a selection of the preludes (RCA) and hear how he turns each one into a short fairy tale. For collectors who value having the repertoire on their shelves, the same programme as Korstick's, bar three amateurish Op 1 Preludes, is available on Naxos. There Alexandre Dossin's playing is somewhat pale and lacking in character and technical ease, but at least it doesn't make you run for cover. **Michelle Assay**

Preludes – selected comparison:

Dossin (11/09) (NAXO) 8 570976

Paradisi

Sonate di gravicembalo – Sonatas Nos 1-10

Anna Paradiso *hpd/clav/fp*

BIS Ⓢ BIS2415 (88' • DDD/DSD)



The keyboard sonatas of Pietro Domenico Paradisi are robust, inventive works, first published in London in 1754. Anna Paradiso misses not a whit of the interest the Neapolitan composer embedded in this music, and she adds considerable invention and drama of her own in these entirely satisfying interpretations. Performing on harpsichord, fortepiano and clavichord, Paradiso finds a world of variation in these

compelling works, some of which broach a chromaticism that seems more of the 19th than the 18th century.

On the page, Paradisi's sonatas look a bit like those of his fellow composer from Naples, Domenico Scarlatti. Much of the writing is in two voices, which range freely over the keyboard with scales and arpeggio figures racing up and down, punctuated by rhythmically propulsive figuration. The first movements are in binary form, like those of Scarlatti, but are followed by second movements in a variety of styles, including gigue, a minuet and a ravishing aria, marked *Larghetto*.

The resemblance to Scarlatti doesn't minimise the individuality and brilliance of Paradisi's idiom, which often feels more of the theatre than the keyboard. The performer's decision to use the full panoply of keyboard instruments available at the time these works were published (minus, of course, the organ), is brilliant. It pushes this music to its extremes, and it is music that wants that push. In the *Andante* of Sonata No 4, performed on clavichord (a restored 1792 instrument originally from Sweden), it sounds as if she is alone in a room, improvising on a lute, exploring the possibilities between *pianissimo* and silence, an impression not dispelled by the occasional dry thump of a left-hand octave or four-note chord. In the *Larghetto* of Sonata No 3, performed on the harpsichord (a contemporary instrument based on a 1730 model by Nicolas and François Blanchet), deft use of the buff stop gives textural variety and increases the drama, which at points in the middle of the movement almost approaches the chromatic intensity of the 25th variation of Bach's *Goldbergs*.

Paradiso is a daring performer, including performing the only work here that is even modestly well known – the 'toccata' second movement from the Sonata in A major – on the fortepiano (a restored 1802 Broadwood). Paradisi lived a long life and died in 1791. These works were written decades earlier than the turn of the 19th century, and might seem alien to the fortepiano's tonal world. Yet the dynamic nuance of the instrument and its range of texture perfectly suit this sonata, especially the first movement, which is one of the delights of the disc. Recovering and restoring all the other sonatas is the performer's welcome gift to all us. **Philip Kennicott**

Rameau • D Scarlatti

'Maestros of the Baroque'

Rameau *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin* – Suite in G **D Scarlatti** *Sonatas* – Kk118; Kk213; Kk380; Kk466; Kk491

Finbarr Malafronte *gtr*

Quartz Ⓢ QTZ2136 (59' • DDD)



If you're used to the brilliance of the harpsichord music of Rameau and Scarlatti

on the instrument for which it was intended, hearing it on the classical guitar for the first time is invariably disappointing. More often than not, this has less to do with the limitations of the instrument than the limitations of the performer. With its ability to evoke sound worlds far beyond its limited dynamic range and compass, the guitar almost requires a rhetorician more than a technician. Because of its Spanish flavour, there's a rich tradition of playing Scarlatti's music on the solo classical guitar – Rameau's less so – although Sylvie Proulx's all-Rameau recital ('Les tendres plaintes'; Centaur, 2018) evinces a sense of style that matches anything Manuel Barrueco, John Williams or David Russell do in Scarlatti.

Rameau isn't easy on the guitar. The copious ornamentation intrinsic to the music presents just one challenge. The other is to project a sense of orchestral colour in movements, such as 'Les Sauvages', which one also finds in operatic works like *Les Indes galantes*. Alas, Finbarr Malafronte makes it sound as difficult as it is. He fares better in the Scarlatti. In Kk491, for example, he exhibits an impressive facility and imaginative sense of colour, let down only by the slightly boxy quality of the recording. He also imbues the F minor Sonata, Kk466, with a subtle dramatic quality.

That the arrangements are Malafronte's own is commendable, and important to a consistent aesthetic. Listening, I just longed for more of the fluency, imagination and confidence of his erstwhile teacher Barrueco. **William Yeoman**

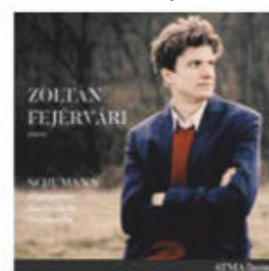
Schumann

Humoreske, Op 20. *Nachtstücke*, Op 23.

Waldszenen, Op 82

Zoltán Fejérvári *pf*

ATMA Classique Ⓢ ACD2 2816 (65' • DDD)



The Hungarian pianist Zoltán Fejérvári, a 2016 Borletti-Buitoni fellow and winner of the Montreal competition the following year, is a member of the chamber music faculty of the Liszt Academy in Budapest.



Christopher Williams makes a strong case for the piano music of Semyon Barmotin, a contemporary of Rachmaninov and Scriabin – see review on page 57

On his latest ATMA Classique release, he plays three major Schumann works, imbuing each with its own distinctive identity.

Listening to the *Waldszenen* from 1849, the year Schumann described as his ‘most productive’, one is immediately struck by the precision, warmth and limpid clarity of Fejérvári’s conception. Phrases are exquisitely sculpted and always ripe with meaning. An almost uncanny sense of proportion prevails; astonishing degrees of variety and colour are contained within the smallest fraction of the dynamic spectrum. Whether depicting the jaunty approach to the forest, the hardy hunters, delicate flowers in a clearing, a wayside inn or the strange song of a bird overhead, these *Waldszenen* evoke a charmed sense of wonder.

The *Nachtstücke*, which along with the *Humoreske* date from a decade earlier, seem to tiptoe into the room. Even though the individual pieces piece lack descriptive titles, Fejérvári presents them so suggestively it’s almost impossible not to imagine programmes. How can one listen to the extrovert third number and not imagine the abandon of a whirling dance, or hear the concluding fourth piece as anything but a poignant leave-taking? For once, the ‘humour’ of this mercurial *Humoreske* is perfectly obvious in its ever-changing moods and whims, now antic, now plaintive.

It’s the sort of music-making that leaves the listener with a gentle smile rather than perplexity. Everywhere, perfectly calculated gestures convey meaning, never overboard or raucous, but perfectly within the bounds of contained, seductively beautiful sound.

Fejérvári is a deeply communicative artist who combines an imperturbable yet magisterial command of his instrument with impeccable musicality. Those who have yet to hear him are in for a rare treat.

Patrick Rucker

‘I Still Play’

Adams I Still Play (Pocket Variations)^a

Laurie Anderson Song for Bob^b Andres Wise Words^b Andriessen Rimsky or La Monte Young^b Dennehy Her Wits (About Him)^b Glass Evening Song No 2^b Mehlidau LA Pastorale^c Metheny 42 Years^c Muhly Move^b Newman Recessional^d Reich For Bob^b

^bTimo Andres, ^aJeremy Denk, ^cBrad Mehldau,

^dRandy Newman *pf*

Nonesuch © 7559 792086-4 (39’ • DDD)



would have taken a very different course were it not for Robert Hurwitz. As president

of Nonesuch Records between 1984 and 2017, Hurwitz not only successfully nurtured and furthered the recording careers of composers ranging from John Adams to John Zorn; he also foresaw the far-reaching changes in listening habits and musical accessibility that took place during this time. Hurwitz was especially interested in ‘unclassifiable’ artists whose aesthetic lay somewhere in between minimalism, jazz and experimental rock, and in doing so developed an ethos that saw Nonesuch artists not so much gravitating towards the mainstream but rather being encouraged to remain true to their own vision in the belief that the mainstream would eventually gravitate towards them. Which it did, more often than not.

The high regard in which Hurwitz was held among the many musicians with whom he worked is reflected on this excellent disc of 11 piano pieces. It would be misleading to detect the presence of his personality throughout, as each piece imprints the composer’s own character on to the music as much as Hurwitz himself. Nevertheless, one senses in the probing, darting, freewheeling motion of Nico Muhly’s *Move*, purposeful bass and rhythmic urgency of Steve Reich’s *For Bob* or the edgy, circling patterns in Donnacha Dennehy’s *Her Wits (About Him)* – all executed with superb control and precision

by Timo Andres – a glimpse of Hurwitz’s razor-sharp critical acumen. Glass’s *Evening Song No 2*, Laurie Anderson’s *Song for Bob* and Andres’s *Wise Words* on the other hand speak more of the man’s warmth and generosity of spirit. John Adams’s *I Still Play* fluctuates between both character traits in a set of variations that cleverly imbues serious moments with trickster elements, in a nuanced performance by Jeremy Denk.

The shifting stepwise harmonies and chromatic spirals heard in Andres’s homage also points to another theme that resonates throughout the album – the B-H (B flat – B natural) play on Bob Hurwitz’s name (a case of ‘Menuet sur le nom de Hurwitz’ perhaps), which others appear to have latched on to as well in different ways: Louis Andriessen’s *Rimsky or La Monte Young* or Brad Mehldau’s dark, moodily evocative *LA Pastorale*, played by the composer himself. Mehldau also takes to the piano on Pat Metheny’s yearning, reflective *42 Years*, showing off the jazz guitarist’s uncanny ability to imbue a new tune with familiar resonances.

Like Andriessen’s souvenir, other pieces draw on a diverse range of references – from Bach and Beethoven to Schoenberg and Satie – to reflect Hurwitz’s own catholic tastes. And herein lies the secret to both Hurwitz and Nonesuch’s success: an ability, as Hurwitz himself put it, to make music ‘for the other people in the room’.

Pwyll ap Siôn

‘Kaleidoscope’

‘Beethoven Transcriptions’

String Quartets: No 6, Op 18 No 6 – 2nd movt^a; No 7, Op 59 No 1 – 2nd movt^a; No 8, Op 59 No 2 – 3rd movt^b; No 13, Op 130 – 5th movt^b; No 16, Op 135^c – 2nd & 3rd movts^c (transcr ^bBalakirev, ^cMussorgsky, ^aSaint-Saëns). Theme and Variations on the fourth movement of Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet, K581

Mari Kodama *pf*

Pentatone © PTC5186 841 (56’ • DDD/DSD)



It takes real thought to come up with something genuinely unusual in Beethoven year, so full marks to Mari Kodama for this recital of transcriptions of string quartet movements, most of which are appearing on disc for the first time.

Kodama writes of how she sees these as ‘poetic adaptations’ that allow her to get closer to the essence of Beethoven’s string music. The art of a fine transcription is to make it sound as comfortable in its new

guise as in the original. The composers here do that with a variety of techniques, Balakirev making the most obviously pianistic additions of rolled chords and bass doublings, though they never sound overblown.

Kodama starts with Saint-Saëns’s arrangement of the *Allegretto vivace* from the First ‘Razumovsky’, bringing to life its playfulness, from the delicately tapping first motif, through a gradual build-up to its final release, which is delightfully dispatched. In the slow movement of the last of the Op 18 Quartets, you inevitably lose some of the textural subtleties, such as the exchange between viola and first violin at 3’12” or the staccato at 4’25”, but Kodama is alive to its limpid allure and paces it very naturally.

From Balakirev we get the rumbustious *Allegretto* from the Second ‘Razumovsky’ and here I was less convinced – it sounds somewhat polite in Kodama’s hands, a sensation that continued into the *maggiore* middle section, which is a touch too timid-sounding. The Cavatina from Op 130 was always going to be a big challenge for an instrument that can’t naturally sustain. While Kodama is careful to pick a tempo that doesn’t drag, you can’t but miss the sheer intensity of four string players giving it their all in the original.

We’re on surer ground in the *Vivace* from Op 135, as reimaged by Mussorgsky, and I like the way Kodama gives it the requisite muscularity and plenty of dynamic contrast. The repetitive bass motif from 1’54” is nicely obsessive without getting aggressive. This is followed by the *Lento assai*, which Kodama takes at a prayerful pace, as befits its mood. But as she reaches the *Più lento* her tempo is such that momentum is almost stilled and it’s a relief to return to Tempo I. She’s almost as spacious as the Busch Quartet; but whereas they sound beatific, the result here is more dithery.

Finally we come to Beethoven himself as transcriber, with the theme-and-variation finale from Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet. This ends the disc in a mood of splendid high jinks, particularly the fourth variation, which is infectiously gleeful. And such is the genius of his ear that you don’t miss Mozart’s distinctive original timbres. So an intriguing disc, very nicely recorded, with some real discoveries along the way.

Harriet Smith

‘Landmarks of Recorded Pianism, Vol 2’

JS Bach/Tausig Toccata and Fugue, BWV565^a
Beethoven Piano Sonatas: No 14, ‘Moonlight’, Op 27 No 2 – 1st movt^b; No 23, ‘Appassionata’,

Op 57^c **Castagnetta** Improvisation on Four Notes^d **Chopin** Mazurka No 5, Op 7 No 1^e.
Polonaises – No 6, ‘Heroic’, Op 53^e; No 9, Op 71 No 2^e. Prelude, ‘Raindrop’, Op 28 No 15^e **Chopin**/
Mompou Waltz No 3, Op 34 No 2^f **Debussy**
Préludes, Book 2 – No 12, Feux d’artifice^g
Gottschalk Pasquinade (Caprice), Op 59^h
Grainger Irish Tune from County Derry^a.
Scotch Strathspey and Reel^a **Liszt/Rosenthal**
Hungarian Rhapsody No 2 (two recordings)ⁱ
Lyapunov Transcendental Étude, ‘Lezhinka’,
Op 11 No 10ⁱ **Mendelssohn** Song without Words,
‘Spinnerlied’, Op 67 No 4^e **Mompou** Cancións y
Danzas Nos 1-6^f. La fuente y la campana^f.
Secreto^f **Monteverdi/Alderighi** Madrigal^g
Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23^k
^dGrace Castagnetta, ^bArnold Dolmetsch,
^cEtelka Freund, ^eIgnacy Friedman, ^aPercy
Grainger, ^kMark Hambourg, ^hFrank La Forge,
^fFederico Mompou, ^gRosita Renard, ⁱMoriz
Rosenthal, ^jReah Sadowsky *pf*

Marston mono © 52075-2 (159’ • ADD)

Recorded 1912-55

Available from marstonrecords.com



Like its predecessor (8/18), the second volume of Marston’s ‘Landmarks’ series

teems with revelations and curios alike. It begins with an experimental 1929 broadcast that preserves the legendary Liszt pupil Moriz Rosenthal in his mentor’s Second *Hungarian Rhapsody*, followed by the pianist’s (relatively) familiar 1931 studio shellac recording as a frame of reference. While the latter is unfettered and freewheeling by today’s standards, it’s got nothing on the broadcast, where Rosenthal stretches the opening section to King Kong dimensions, replete with added runs and filled-in octaves. The Friska abounds with pounded-out clusters that sound like Ervin Nyiregyházi in heat, while Rosenthal simply goes nuts in the cadenza. This is the most insane Second Rhapsody I’ve ever heard, and I wouldn’t want it any other way!

Three solos from a 1953 concert reveal Percy Grainger’s technique in fine estate, with his projection and full-bodied tone intact. In addition to Grainger’s own *Scotch Strathspey and Reel* (which he otherwise did not record), we have renditions of the Bach/Tausig Toccata and Fugue, BWV565, and *Londonderry Air* that are even more impassioned than the pianist’s earlier studio traversals. For truly ravishing tone, however, a series of 78s with Federico Mompou in his own works gives a much better idea of his sound world than his LP recordings suggest.

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Mari Kodama*

The pianist follows her earlier Beethoven discs with an unusual album of transcriptions, including first recordings of arrangements by Saint-Saëns and Mussorgsky

Piano arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies – notably Liszt's – are well known. Why did you choose to focus on arrangements of movements from his string quartets?

Franz Liszt was a protégé of Beethoven and saw himself as his legitimate successor. His transcriptions of the symphonies are indeed well known, and have been performed and recorded regularly. For me, however, these transcriptions are aesthetic expressions that are as equally Liszt as they are Beethoven. The supporting gestures, textures, dramatic imagination and colour are tied to Liszt's legendary virtuoso technique, and one could well imagine celebrating a Liszt anniversary year with these brilliant transcriptions.

Liszt famously didn't manage to arrange Beethoven's quartets for solo piano to his satisfaction, while other composers selected individual movements – how did they approach this music as transcribers, and how do you as a performer?

Liszt's own compositions explore several mediums, but he never composed string quartets. Had he written for this medium, it would have been especially interesting to see how he might have imagined transcriptions of the Beethoven quartets and met the difficult challenge. The transcriptions of movements of Beethoven's string quartets by Saint-Saëns and Mussorgsky, great

composers in their own right, are rather unknown and have never been recorded. Their approach towards Beethoven's music is very different and each tried to find a balance between his language and their own. As a performer, it is always an interesting challenge to find the interpretative pathway between Beethoven and the transcriber. Particularly difficult is to somehow keep the original character of string instruments while using the keyboard in a natural, pianistic way.

It is important to remember that in addition to his many talents as performer and composer, Beethoven was also a fantastic arranger. For example, in his transcription of a movement of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet he succeeded to make the arrangement pianistic by subtly changing a few notes while still making it sound like the original.

Beethoven's 250th anniversary is a wonderful opportunity for us to focus once again on the genius of his music. It is a moment to celebrate the eternal relevance of his well-known masterpieces, and can also be seen as a moment to present some of his lesser-known compositions so that we can see his work from new perspectives. There is no end to his universe.



You've been on a long Beethoven journey yourself, recording all the piano concertos and sonatas. Will there be more?

Beethoven is a lifetime companion and I will continue to perform, research and perhaps record his music. In addition, in the coming years I will be exploring composers who were inspired and greatly influenced by the foundations Beethoven built, and yet at the same time struggled to free themselves as they forged a pathway towards the future. We cannot think of Brahms's First Piano Sonata, for example, without sensing the influence of Beethoven's Sonata Op 106. The plan will be to explore the evolution of European music following Beethoven and how his influences affected composers of the generations who followed – particularly Schumann, Brahms and Schoenberg.

I don't find Ignacy Friedman's rare 1933 Chopin Op 53 Polonaise as 'buttoned-up' as Gregor Benko's excellent annotations claim, except when measured alongside the pianist's familiar and decidedly 'unbuttoned' 1927 recording. It's followed by a sonically poor home recording of a 1933 Tokyo broadcast that resists casual listening. But if you persist, you'll notice a freer, more fanciful Friedman than on his studio versions of the Chopin 'Raindrop' Prelude, B flat Mazurka, Op 7 No 1, and B flat Polonaise, along with a rapid-transit Mendelssohn 'Spinning Song' new to his discography.

Perhaps Gottschalk's Caprice is the strongest of Frank La Forge's rather ordinary 1912 RCA solo sides, although Rosita Renard's 1930 Debussy 'Feux

d'artifice' more than lives up to the work's descriptive title. Prior to this collection's incisive 1945 broadcast of Lyapunov's 'Lezhinka' I'd never heard before of Reah Sadowsky (1915-2012). In a live 1955 Tchaikovsky First Concerto, Mark Hambourg's free-spirited temperament is heard to far better advantage and with superior orchestral support from Malcolm Sargent than in the pianist's 1926 commercial HMV 78s. There are typically Hambourgian slapdash moments, yet some of his chance-taking really succeeds (his no-holds-barred octaves), not to mention the underlying energy and mobility in lyrical passages.

Early-instrument pioneer Arnold Dolmetsch's 1933 period-piano reading

of the Beethoven *Moonlight* Sonata's *Adagio* may have been the first on disc to take the composer's controversial long pedal indications on faith. I often find Etelka Freund's artistic pedigree more interesting than her surviving post-war broadcasts and commercial discs, including the 1951 Beethoven *Appassionata* offered here; try to track down instead a two-CD Pearl release produced by Allan Evans featuring Freund's superb Brahms Sonata No 3, Op 5. Lastly, we hear Grace Castagnetta take four notes suggested by audience members and use them as the basis for a charming improvisation. In sum, a self-recommending feast for hardcore piano mavens who think they've heard everything. **Jed Distler**

Hildur Guðnadóttir

James McCarthy profiles the experimental Icelandic composer who has quickly become one of the most sought-after film composers

Every aspect of a traditional ‘classical’ composer’s craft requires a degree of compromise. Notation, no matter how meticulously realised, can never fully represent the work as conjured in the composer’s imagination; and no performance or recording can ever fully recreate every intention of a score – so it becomes a compromise upon a compromise. This isn’t to say, of course, that the whole business of writing and recording music is a fruitless exercise, it is simply that each element of the process that requires the music to be ‘translated’ into another medium moves the music further from the composer’s initial conception – sometimes for better, sometimes for worse.

There are no grand gestures or ‘new-musical’ gambits – it’s just a supremely creative musician taking an idea for a walk

Advances in the affordability and accessibility of recording technology over the last few decades have made it possible to write and record entire albums’ worth of music from home, practically alone, on nothing more than a laptop. It’s a model that has been widespread in pop music for years, but there are also many composers who are self-producing recordings of great interest to *Gramophone* readers, and one of the most compelling and successful is Hildur Guðnadóttir.

Born in Reykjavik, Iceland, into a musical family, she began playing the cello aged five, and the instrument remains her central voice and creative outlet as a composer. Her four solo albums, the first, ‘Mount A’, originally released in 2006 on the 12 Tónar label, the following three – ‘Without Sinking’ (2009), ‘Leyfðu ljósinu’ (2012) and ‘Saman’ (2014) – released on Touch (now licensed to DG), all have the cello at their heart, but it is unlike any cello you’ve heard before. She uses the instrument, along with her own voice and electronic manipulation, to create vast collages of sound that seem to move through time rather more like clouds, or waves, than like music.

Whereas for many composers the recording is the end point of their process, for Guðnadóttir her compositions begin with recording, with collecting sounds, either from instruments or from her environment. These recordings are then layered, manipulated and transformed until the form and character of the work gradually appears. It’s an intuitive and instinctive creative process, and it results in recordings that have a distinctive, intimate and unique quality.

What really draws me to Guðnadóttir’s recordings is the tangible sense that you are listening to a composer making



She’s as much vocalist and cellist as composer, as heard on many of her recordings

sounds in her own small room. If you listen to a track like *Ascent* from ‘Without Sinking’, you can sense not only the exquisite craft of her cello-playing but also the physical space that the music is being born into. It is very ‘specific’ music in the sense that it is utterly personal and confiding, as though this music would be precisely as it is whether or not there was an audience to hear it. There are no grand rhetorical gestures or ‘new-musical’ gambits, it’s just one supremely creative musician taking an idea for a walk.

A track like *Strokur*, the opening piece on ‘Saman’, draws the listener in through the extraordinary delicacy of the cello-playing. Notes are coaxed from the strings at the very edge of silence, you can hear Guðnadóttir’s fingers depressing the strings, her breath, and the hairs on the bow throwing out tendrils of harmonics into the air. It’s as much about sound as it is about music, and, like some of Helmut Lachenmann’s and John Luther Adams’s work, reminds me that musical instruments are often at their most revealing when they are pushed into uncomfortable areas – when their voices crack.

GUÐNADÓTTIR FACTS

1982 Born September 4, in Reykjavik, Iceland
1987 Begins cello lessons at age five and later goes on to study at the Reykjavik Music Academy, the Iceland Academy of the Arts and Berlin's University of the Arts
2006 releases first solo album, 'Mount A'
2019 Scores HBO miniseries *Chernobyl*, which earns her an Emmy and a Grammy. Named Television Composer of the Year at the 2019 World Soundtrack Awards. Signs exclusive contract with DG
2020 Wins several awards for her score for *Joker*, becoming the first ever female composer to win an Academy award, a Golden Globe award and a Bafta in the same season. Also wins a Hollywood Critics Association award

One of Guðnadóttir's most compelling works is the 35-minute *Leyfðu ljósinu* ('Allow the light'). Tony Myatt recorded the piece live at the University of York's Music Research Centre, and it features just Guðnadóttir alone with her cello, voice and electronics. It builds on the simplest of musical materials, Guðnadóttir layering recordings of her voice to create huge clouds of sound that move slowly through the space. As the piece grows, the cello returns, bringing with it

a storm of dissonance and a sense of grief that explodes into rage as the piece reaches its ferocious climax.

These solo recordings earned Guðnadóttir a small but loyal following, but it was the score for the TV miniseries *Chernobyl* that launched her into the mainstream and set her on a trajectory which makes her one of the most successful and in-demand film composers in the world today. And in such a short time, too. Guðnadóttir is an experimental composer to her bones, so it is perhaps no surprise that she took a most unusual route to fulfilling her brief for this series. She wrote the music in parallel to the shooting of the scenes. And she created all of the sounds for the score from field recordings that she made alongside Chris Watson, the veteran wildlife sound recordist behind many of David Attenborough's nature programmes – including *The Life of Birds*, *The Life of Mammals*, *Life in the Undergrowth* and *Frozen Planet*. The site for these recordings was a decommissioned nuclear power plant in Lithuania, the same power plant in which they shot many of the scenes for the series. On *Score: The Podcast* in

May 2019, Guðnadóttir describes one particular metal door at the power station that became one of the principal musical features of the series: 'The big solo musician of the score was this door which just made this *incredible* sound. It was a door to a pump room ... We just came up to this door with the microphone ... and there were all these high frequencies that were just making these crazy noises. They were almost inaudible, so high-pitched ... I would just listen to this door for hours and hours and hours.' She goes on to describe how suddenly she'd hear a sound and exclaim, "Oh, my God! There's a melody!" So I would just take those little snippets and they would become the melodic aspects of the score.'

Unlike most Hollywood film scores, which are written at the very end of the production process, Guðnadóttir's music for *Joker* was written based on the script. Perhaps this is one of the keys to her success: that she has had the time and space to create her own world of sound, away from the filming itself. This allows the music to stand on its own merits, create its own world, its own sense of place and mood, so that when it's combined with the filmed scenes, it simply elevates them to another level. Simply mirroring or musically describing what is happening on the screen is not how Guðnadóttir works.

Having won an Emmy for her score to *Chernobyl* and a Bafta, a Golden Globe award and an Academy award for *Joker*, Guðnadóttir has achieved so much, so quickly, that it will be fascinating to see what happens next. But be in no doubt, she is already an inspiration. When Guðnadóttir received her Academy award this year, she took a deep breath, and said: 'To the girls, to the women, to the mothers, to the daughters, who hear the music bubbling within: please speak up – we need to hear your voices.' **G**

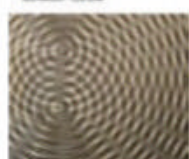
ENTER GUÐNADÓTTIR'S SOUND WORLD

Be mesmerised by her writing as well as her playing

**'Without Sinking'**

Hildur Guðnadóttir, with Jóhann Jóhannsson, Skúli Sverrisson and Guðni Franzson
 Decca

A perfect entry point into Guðnadóttir's sound world is offered up by *Ascent*, but this is an album to get lost in, over and over.

**'Leyfðu ljósinu' ('Allow the light')**

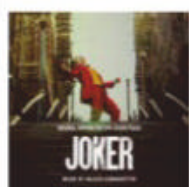
Hildur Guðnadóttir
 DG

This is a stunning, hypnotic live recording of a work performed solo by Guðnadóttir – though you would never guess it, such is the tremendous tidal wave of sound she builds up over the work's 35-minute span.

**'Chernobyl' (OST)**

Hildur Guðnadóttir; Homin Lviv Municipal Choir et al
 DG

This score changed everything for Guðnadóttir. Using only sounds recorded at an abandoned power plant in Lithuania, she creates a tense, claustrophobic and totally unpredictable new musical world. Music is sound, sound is music.

**'Joker' (OST)**

Hildur Guðnadóttir; Hollywood Studio Symphony et al
 Watertower Music

This multiple-award-winning score was written before the film was shot, and even inspired one of its key scenes: when the Joker is dancing in a bathroom he is actually dancing to Guðnadóttir's music that was played on set.

Vocal



Hugo Shirley enjoys a mixed recital from the tenor Ilker Arcayürek:

'Though fundamentally lyrical in character, his voice can take on an extra steel – with hints of a Peter Schreier-like edge' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



Alexandra Coghlan hears American music from Merton College:

'They steer away from the lush end of the repertoire towards the leaner sound world of Mubly and Lang' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**

Beethoven

'Songs and Folksongs'

Adelaide, Op 46. Andenken, WoO136^a. An die ferne Geliebte, Op 98. Aus Goethes Faust, Op 75 No 3. In questa tomba oscura, WoO133. Twelve Irish Songs, WoO154^a – No 4, The Pulse of an Irishman; No 5, Oh! Who, my dear Dermot. 25 Irish Songs, WoO152^a – No 1, The Return to Ulster; No 8, Come draw we round a cheerful ring. Acht Lieder, Op 52 – No 4, Maigesang; No 7, Marmotte. O Mary, ye's be clad in silk, WoO158^b No 6^a. The Parting Kiss^a. Resignation, WoO149^a. 25 Scottish Songs, Op 108^a – No 2, Sunset; No 8, The Lovely Lass of Inverness. Sehnsucht, WoO134. Zärtliche Liebe, WoO123

Ian Bostridge *ten* **Antonio Pappano** *pf* with

^a**Vilde Frang** *vn* ^a**Nicolas Altstaedt** *vc*

Warner Classics © 9029 52764-3 (62' • DDD • T/t)



We could do a lot worse in the Beethoven year than listen more to his

songs. Too easily overlooked, they represent a fascinating glimpse into an intimate side of their composer. Almost naive, and often movingly gentle, they show a Beethoven treading carefully in a nascent genre – we're worlds away from the fist-shaking Promethean of the Romantic imagination, tearing up the rule book for the symphony and sonata.

Nevertheless, Beethoven still managed to innovate here, and is usually credited with writing the first song-cycle with his *An die ferne Geliebte*. This new recording from Ian Bostridge and Antonio Pappano is the third major account to be released this year, following those by Matthias Goerne with Jan Lisiecki (DG, 4/20) and Roderick Williams with Iain Burnside (Chandos, 6/20), not to mention the version from a sweet-toned Robin Tritschler with Malcolm Martineau, released late last year (Signum, 1/20).

Each of these recordings makes for fascinating listening, with this newcomer fusing Bostridge's detailed, borderline fussy manner with Pappano's sprightly playing,

buoyant and delicate. One misses limpidness in Bostridge's tone, admittedly, but he makes the songs his own in a performance that is never less than engaging and, as usual, conveys an unflinching and persuasive belief in the material.

He and Pappano are terrific in the 'Song of the Flea' and offer what feels like a fascinating glimpse into the composer's workshop with his four 'Sehnsucht' settings, presented consecutively. There are more mellifluous accounts of 'Adelaide' and 'Ich liebe dich' out there, but in those and in a suitably intense 'In questa tomba oscura', the performances are nevertheless persuasive.

The folk-song arrangements are a little more problematic, with Bostridge sounding strangely unnatural with the language, failing to capture the necessary artlessness in the jollier songs, despite some lively tempos and superbly pointed playing from Vilde Frang and Nicolas Altstaedt – starry casting indeed. He's better in the more melancholy numbers, such as the moving 'Return to Ulster' (although he sings Scott's first three verses here, not the exact text as printed in the booklet).

In sum, though it doesn't necessarily include first-choice recordings for any of these songs, this is a valuable and persuasive album from this high-profile duo. **Hugo Shirley**

Bononcini

La conversione di Maddalena

Emanuela Galli, Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli *sops*

Marta Fumagalli *contr* **Mateo Bellotto** *bass*

La Venexiana / **Gabriele Palomba** *theorbo*

Glossa © ② GCD920944 (105' • DDD • T/t)



Before Bononcini joined Handel writing operas for London's King's Theatre during the 1720s, the highly esteemed Modenese composer, cellist and singer had successful stints in Bologna, Rome, Berlin and Vienna, where from 1698 to 1711 he

was employed by emperors Leopold I and Joseph I. *La conversione di Maddalena* was first performed at the Hofburgkapelle during Lent 1701; its anonymous libretto presents the remorseful Mary Magdalene renouncing her lascivious past, with encouragement from her sister Martha, and contradictory advice offered by Divine Love and Profane Love.

La Venexiana's long-delayed return to the recording studio is under the direction of theorbist Gabriele Palomba; it is a nice touch that this is dedicated to Claudio Cavina, whose health problems led to his early retirement a few years ago. The solemnly twisting contrapuntal strings in the Sinfonia are played with both passion and refinement – characteristics that pervade much of this performance. Emanuela Galli's quicksilver shaping of lines and articulate communication of Mary Magdalene's journey from initial worldly sensuality to penitence are enthralling. A tempestuous vision of the abyss that awaits because of her promiscuity ('Odi l'Etera') leads cathartically into a weeping lament accompanied dolorously by reduced strings ('In tepidi fiume di lagrime amare'); the character's vacillations between listening to temptations and seeing the light are depicted in two arias requiring brilliant vocal agility in partnership with a pair of concertante violins ('Cor imbelle' and 'Sì, sì risolvo'). Her eventual resolution to discard her jewels and shatter her mirror ('Comincio a sospirar') is sung with breathy remorse. Marta Fumagalli sings with firmly focused clarity in extrovert outbursts, such as Martha's feisty prophecy that her sister risks the inextinguishable fires of hell if she continues to procrastinate repentance ('Di lagrime, di gemiti'), but the alto also sings with simplicity and beauty in the compassionate warning 'Quel volto, quel labro' (in dialogue with gorgeous six-part concertino strings) and in praise of the sweet ecstasy that only sacred love brings ('Tenerissimi sospiri' – a musical counterpart of Bernini's St Teresa).

Matteo Bellotto's Profane Love shows convivial bafflement at Magdalene's



Persuasive intensity: Ian Bostridge, accompanied by Antonio Pappano, conveys an unflinching belief in Beethoven's songs

newfound disdain for sinful pleasure, and his soft flattery that her beauty reflects the stars and that her blond locks are chains that captivate the soul and outshine the sun fit neatly with his philosophy that she can always repent much later on (a line delivered with a subterranean low note that ought to give her a clue about where his charm offensive will lead her). Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli's vivid shading and extrovert imploring guarantee that Divine Love is no shrinking violet – 'Fugge il tempo, e seco a volo' and 'Oh d'un'alma che non ha fede' typify the soprano's highly decorous embellishments, fondness for broad dynamic range and exaggerated contrasts within phrases; albeit gripping, perhaps less could have been more. Nevertheless, convincing recordings of complete large works by Bononcini are as rare as hen's teeth, which makes La Venexiana's masterful advocacy particularly welcome.

David Vickers

Cleve

Cleve Missa Rex Babylonis. Carole cui nomen. Carole qui veniens. Credo quod redemptor. Es wel uns Gott genedig sein. Laudate Dominum. Timete Dominum **Vaet** Rex Babylonis **Cinquecento**
Hyperion © CDA68241 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Since their inception, Cinquecento have shone a light on the Imperial Habsburg court, which hitherto had warranted barely a metaphorical footnote in music history. Thanks to this Vienna-based ensemble, we now know that the court boasted some exceptional composers. First among them remains the short-lived master of the Imperial chapel, Jacobus Vaet, on whose motet is based the *Missa Rex Babylonis* by Johannes de Cleve (1528/29-1582). This composer coincided with Vaet in Vienna (hence, no doubt, the gesture of homage in the Mass) and retained Habsburg connections throughout his peripatetic career: two of many motets in honour of the dynasty and its adherents are included here.

Cleve's stylistic range is considerable: the Mass has solid textures and little in the way of reduced scoring. The 'Et incarnatus' of the *Credo*, a rare moment of entirely chordal writing, is specially affecting. Generally speaking, Cleve responds well to the Mass text's more poignant passages (as the following 'Crucifixus' shows). That observation also holds true of the motets, which are texturally more varied. One is

tempted to relate these differences to the styles of better-known figures, but that is to sell him short: in *Timete Dominum* and *Credo quod redemptor*, technical fluency is matched with accents of real poignancy, as also is the commemorative motet *Carole cui nomen*. As one has come to expect, Cinquecento's singers render these touches admirably, while intricate textures are delivered with exemplary clarity. While the album's tenor is undeniably solemn, their sonority, soft and intimate yet full, gives real pleasure. Of all their recordings devoted to 'minor masters', this strikes me as one of the finest. **Fabrice Fitch**

Handel

'Arcadian Affairs'

Chi rapì la pace al core?, HWV90. Fra pensieri quel pensiero, HWV115. La Lucrezia, HWV145. Lungi dal mio bel nume, HWV127a. Nice, che fa? Che pensa?, HWV138

Ditte Marie Bræin sop **Marianne Beate**

Kielland mez **Christian Kjos** hpd

Simax © PSC1365 (61' • DDD • T/t)



The harpsichordist Christian Kjos presents five continuo cantatas composed in Italy

between late 1706 and early 1710. *Nice, che fa? Che pensa?* and *Lungi dal mio bel nume* are bona fide rarities with just one obscure previous recording apiece. On the other hand, the intensely dramatic masterpiece *La Lucrezia* has a large and diverse discography. Kjos accompanies Norwegian compatriots Ditte Marie Bræin and Marianne Beate Kielland without the usual panoply of additional continuo instruments (cello, theorbo and so on); his elaborate countermelodies and unusually rich harmonic ideas are informed by treatises by Handel's contemporaries Heinichen and Mattheson that discuss extemporised harpsichord continuo embellishments, describing that skilled harpsichordists improvised to a significant level of complexity over the top of the notated bass line. Extracts from Handel's keyboard pieces serve as introductory preludes to three of the cantatas, whereas playing in recitatives is modelled after the composer's own late-1730s notation of rich chords in his rearrangement of *Crudel tiranno amor*, HWV97b. The results often resemble obligato harpsichord parts rather than discreet chordal support and challenge preconceptions about how this repertoire can be played, but the transparency of a fine copy of a late 17th-century Florentine instrument never risks an overload of density and the accompaniments never detract from the singers.

Bræin sings with unaffected purity in *Nice, che fa? Che pensa?*, the brief yet lovely *Chi rapì la pace al core?* (Kjos's imaginative realisation and passing dissonances fitting the tormented final aria like a glove), and *Lungi dal mio bel nume*; her ornamentation is graceful and she has an admirably neat trill, even if emotional storytelling is a touch cool. There is plenty of expressive warmth and Italianate fluency in Kielland's lyrical *Fra pensieri quel pensiero* (introduced by the Sonata in G minor, HWV580), and she conveys the bitter poignancy, furious vigour and tragic pathos of a rape victim's suicide in *La Lucrezia* – this compelling interpretation by just two accomplished musicians performing at low Roman pitch (A=392) is the total antithesis of Raymond Leppard's orchestral rearrangement for Janet Baker's iconic recording that held sway for so long. **David Vickers**

Lassus

'Inferno'

Ad Dominum cum tribularer. Audi tellus. Circumdederunt me dolores mortis. Cum essem parvulus. Deficiat in dolore vita mea. Libera me Domine. Media vita in morte sumus. Omnia tempus habent. O mors quam amara. Recordare Jesu pie. Vidi calumnias. Vide homo

Cappella Amsterdam / Daniel Reuss

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2650 (49' • DDD • T/t)



As with Brahms, Lassus's late style tends towards concision and

seriousness – words he himself used to describe these qualities. Cappella Amsterdam's previous release in this set of three motet anthologies was devoted to Josquin and drew on penitential works; this second instalment also privileges solemn subject matter. A close comparator is the recital by Collegium Vocale Gent (on the same label, 3/09), which drew entirely from the last motet publication issued in the composer's lifetime (Graz, 1594).

Cappella Amsterdam deliver what Philippe Herreweghe's ensemble somehow failed to a decade ago. Ensemble cohesion is greater (surprisingly, given Herreweghe's usual fastidiousness) but details are more persuasively shaped. Lassus is particularly eloquent when texts cry out for imaginative responses. Standouts in this respect are *Vidi calumnias*, which includes the famous phrase 'evil under the sun', *Cum essem parvulus* ('When I was a child I spoke as a child ...') and the timeless *O mors quam amara* (intriguingly, Brahms set these last two in his *Vier ernste Gesänge*); these are particularly well handled, and it is fitting to end with the concluding motet from Lassus's posthumous masterpiece, *Lagrime di San Pietro*. Where the text gives strong cues of an overall architecture (as in the opening *Omnia tempus habent*), this is confidently executed.

Extroversion is not a characteristic one often associates with modern choral ensembles devoted to early repertoires, and one can envisage starker responses to Lassus's at times startling turns of phrase, but these might require a rather smaller group. Here there are 16 singers, but they can be lithe or monumental as needed. In any case, these works benefit from a certain objective distance. In that spirit, rather than draw attention to himself, Daniel Reuss directs with a certain reserve; that these performances do not sound conducted is meant as a compliment. **Fabrice Fitch**

Le Jeune

Le printemps – Amour, quand fus-tu né?; La bel' aronde; La béle gloire, le bél honeur doner; Brunelette, joliette; Ces amoureux n'ont que douleur et tourment; Le chant du rossignol; Francine, Rôzine; Je l'ay, je l'ay la belle fleur; Mes yeus ne cesseront i' point; Perdre le sens devant vous; Première fantaisie à 4; Quiconq' l'amour

noma l'amour; O Rôze, reyne des fleurs; Voicy le verd et beau may

Ensemble Gilles Binchois / Dominique Vellard *ten*

Evidence © EVCD069 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Claude Le Jeune (1528/30-1600) was one of the more adventurous

composers of the late 16th century and part of a movement seeking to restore the effects of ancient music. The collection of 39 works in *Le printemps* (of which 13 are selected on this disc) represent his work imitating the poetic forms and metres of classical antiquity, a movement encapsulated in verse by Joachin Du Bellay in 1549: 'Sing to me those odes, yet unknown to the French music, on a lute well tuned to the sound of the Greek and Roman lyre!' (*La défense et illustration de la langue française*).

What sounds rather technical is anything but when sculpted by Le Jeune. Take his most famous composition, *La bel' aronde* ('The beautiful swallow'), in which five strophes of four lines are sung by four voices (these are called the *chant*) and alternate with a recurring refrain (the *rechant*). Ensemble Gilles Binchois beautifully capture the suppleness of Le Jeune's setting, clearly mindful of the composer's own advice that his music should be known 'as if by heart'. There's great warmth and care in this performance, both singers and plucked strings finding a brightness and lightness that complement the fluidity of these homophonic textures.

Yet *La bel' aronde* is also rather conservative: I prefer the fluid approaches to tempo from Douce Mémoire (2017) or even the Purcell Consort of Voices (Argo, 7/72 – nla). Similarly, in *Brunelette, joliette* ('Pretty little Brunelette'), despite beauty and shapeliness, the Binchois ensemble fail to sparkle compared with the light-footed dance of Douce Mémoire, who find in the first phrase a breathless momentum that matches the fall of the melody. Yet in *La béle gloire* ('To give beauteous glory'), the Binchois ensemble's *a cappella* performance is possibly the most exquisite on record, their statuesque textures being unrivalled in more sombre poetry. **Edward Breen**

Park

'When Love Speaks'

Antiphon for the Angels. Holy is the True Light. Louisa. Shakespeare Love Songs. Shakespeare Songs of Night-Time. Sing to me, windchimes
The Epiphoni Consort / Tim Reader
Delphian © DCD34239 (50' • DDD)



Exemplary clarity: the Vienna-based Cinquecento excel in music by the 16th-century composer Johannes de Cleve – see review on page 67



When it comes to vocal music it's less a case of boldly going where no man has

gone before than boldly going where many have already been. The shadows of Holst, Vaughan Williams, Butterworth, Somervell and more hang around this collection of choral settings by the young British composer Owain Park (b1993). You scan the song titles – 'Loveliest of trees', 'The cloud-capp'd towers', 'Into my heart an air that kills' – and you hear music embedded with the familiar texts. It takes a brave composer to follow them, and it says much for Park's quietly distinctive voice, his careful ear for text and texture, that by the end he makes each his own.

Take Housman's famous 'Loveliest of trees'. An upward arabesque by a solo soprano opens out into choral writing that's thickly clustered, blossomy. The solitary observer so keenly painted in Butterworth's song strikes out along different paths in the imitative 'I will go' entries, fanning out across the texture. Shakespeare's 'cloud-capp'd towers' reach upwards in misty, ambiguous progressions, cleverly

receding and approaching through the texture. Elsewhere in this effective cycle – *Shakespeare Songs of Night-Time* – we get drama as well as atmospherics in the playful 'Weary with toil', in addition to the menacing, incantatory 'Now it is the time of night'.

At just 26 years old, Park already has a full choral recording of his music (Hyperion, A/18). This release introduced the composer in meticulous, rapturous performances by The Choir of Trinity College Cambridge. If this new collection by Tim Reader's Epiphoni Consort lacks their polish, it's an attractive sampler of new repertoire, dominated by secular part-songs and choral cycles.

But for all the effectiveness of these secular works, it's in the anthems that Park is most interesting, most ambitious. *Holy is the True Light* and especially *Antiphon for the Angels* are striking, substantial works. Park's sometime composition teacher John Rutter is quoted in the booklet describing his 'towers of sound'. This sense of architectural as well as sonic scope underpins the thrilling *Antiphon*, its solo violin (expressively played by Gabriella Jones) flickering around the choral body of sound, the 'spirited light' described in Hildegard of Bingen's verse.

I'm not sure Epiphoni's forward-thrusting, full-blooded sound suits music that delights in elision and occlusion, in soft, fraying edges. Park's are not loud statements; the interest is all in the detail, the precise marriage of text and tone colour. But a whisper can carry further than a shout, and I suspect we'll be hearing a lot more from him.

Alexandra Coghlan

Prokofiev

'Songs and Romances'

Alexander Nevsky, Op 78 – Mark, ye bright falcons (The Field of the Dead). Anyutka, Op 66a No 2. Chatterbox, Op 68 No 1. Katerina, Op 104 No 6. Lieutenant Kijé, Op 60 – My grey dove is full of sorrow. Five Poems, Op 23 – No 2, The Little Grey Dress; No 3, Follow me; No 5, The Prophet. Five Poems of Anna Akhmatova, Op 27. Remember me, Op 36 No 4. The Ugly Duckling, Op 18. With a blush, Op 73 No 2

Margarita Gritskova *sop* Maria Prinz *pf*
Naxos @ 8 574030 (66' • DDD)



Prokofiev's 72 songs are less well known than other corners of his repertoire, so any

chance to increase familiarisation is welcome. Margarita Gritskova, a young Russian mezzo who has been a member of the Wiener Staatsoper ensemble since 2012, here presents a handful of these songs on this new disc, accompanied by the pianist Maria Prinz.

In his booklet note entitled 'Prokofiev as Melodist', Wilhelm Sinkovicz describes Prokofiev's response to the 1917 premiere of his *Five Poems of Anna Akhmatova*: 'Many people believed for the first time that I could also write lyrical music.' And they do have moments of great lyricism, especially when performed with such poise by Gritskova, touchingly tender in 'Memory of the Sun', but there are also many stories in Prokofiev's songs. 'The Ugly Duckling' is a familiar enough tale, but there's also 'The Sorcerer' who lives alone in an old castle, so conjures up a wife who is so dutiful, so quiet that he goes off and hangs himself! Or 'Chatterbox', a little girl who denies she has any time for chatter while rattling off all the things that keep her busy. There are folk-song settings too, garrulous, animated, often poking fun.

There are a lot of words to get your head around here, so it's little short of deplorable that Naxos – 'for copyright reasons' – has not printed texts or translations for half the songs on this disc. Delos, on its three-disc set of complete songs, managed to publish these texts in full, so I can only surmise that Naxos has skimmed for financial reasons, which is a shame because it certainly detracts from enjoyment having to faff around locating these texts online (the Delos booklet proved invaluable).

Gritskova's performances are a delight though. She has a light, flexible mezzo – she's sung a fair number of Rossini roles – and displays an engaging personality, particularly in 'The Rosy Dawn', a song of mock-innocence about a shepherdess trying to pluck cherries. She relates the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale with ebullience and there's a twinkle in her eye in 'Katerina', one of the Op 104 *Russian Folksongs*. Listeners more familiar with Prokofiev's orchestral music will recognise the little song 'My grey dove is full of sorrow' from the film music to *Lieutenant Kijé* and a heartfelt rendition of 'The Field of the Dead' from the cantata *Alexander Nevsky*. Neither of these was set for piano by Prokofiev (hence they are excluded from the Delos set). The songs are presented chronologically, which gives a fair overview of Prokofiev's output, but the *Nevsky* lament doesn't really work when it follows on the heels of 'Chatterbox'. Clumsy programming and a penny-pinching booklet – given the vocal qualities, that's a shame. **Mark Pullinger**

Songs – selected comparison:

Slavny, Pluzhnikov, Sokolova, Aleksashkin, Evtodieva, Serov
(DELO) DE3275

Rossi

La lyra d'Orfeo^a. Arpa Davidica^b

^aVéronique Gens, ^bCéline Scheen *sops*

^bGiuseppina Bridelli *mez* ^bPhilippe Jaroussky,

^bJakub Józef Orliński, ^bValer Sabadus *countertens*

L'Arpeggiata / Christina Pluhar

Erato ™ ③ 9029 53723-0 (159' • DDD • T/t)

^aRecorded 2005



This triple album comprises two projects recorded 14 years apart. A few

relatively better-known arias and cantatas are interspersed among plenty of bona fide rarities: 20 tracks are flagged as premiere recordings, although half of these are credited as arrangements by the ever-inventive Christine Pluhar and two are anonymous compositions. Whether assorted bits and pieces were designed for courtly music-making in Rome, Paris or elsewhere, they offer a rich perspective on Rossi's passionate word-setting, dramatic expressiveness and harmonic fantasy.

Véronique Gens and L'Arpeggiata recorded *La lyra d'Orfeo* in 2005 but it languished in the vaults until now. Expressions of desire or heartbreak in 'Begl'occhi, che dite' and 'Questo picciolo rio' are performed seductively, although the deployment of psaltery in addition to rapturous theorbo, harp, organ and viola da gamba gilds the lily. The lament 'Se dolente e flebil cetra' has intertwining violins and cornetto juxtaposed with Gens's sensual phrasing, while a revolving door of continuo colours is applied with discretion. On the other hand, 'La bella più bella' is treated with pizzicato violone bass and improvised plucking aplenty. A sequence from *L'Orfeo* (Paris, 1647) presents Euridice's brightly dancelike 'A l'imperio d'Amore' (with improvisational cornetto and lively percussion) and exquisite declaration of fidelity 'Mio ben, teco il tormento' (the descending four-note ground bass realised lushly); there is also a gorgeous account of Orfeo's plaint upon losing Euridice ('Lasciate Averno'). The longest set piece is the spellbinding 'Lamento di Arione' – although a sudden downward scale played by organ when Arion jumps into the sea is inadvertently comical.

Sessions in 2019 yielded *Arpa Davidica*. A roster of five singers appear in tandem with an even larger crew of continuo players

including two additional harpists (but losing psaltery and percussion in the process), and a mostly different group of string players. Ironic emulations of a cuckoo in 'Dopo lungo penare' are delivered wittily by Jakub Józef Orliński. 'M'uccidete begl'occhi' is shaded melancholically by Philippe Jaroussky. The canzonetta 'La gelosia' demands theatrical fury and virtuoso agility from Valer Sabadus, whose soft limpidity is equally impressive in Orfeo's grief-stricken 'Lagrima, dove sete'. Céline Scheen's steely timbre and contoured exclamations are by turns passionate and pathetic in the anonymous yet beguiling 'S'era alquanto addormentato'. Bradamante's poignant lament 'Sol per breve momento' and resolute soliloquy 'Dove mi spingi, Amor' from *Il palazzo incantato* (Rome, 1642) are sung emotively and articulately by Giuseppina Bridelli; she conveys trajectories of vulnerability, intimacy and desperation during the 'Lamento di Olimpia' and 'Lamento di Erminia'.

Except for an unfettered parody of kitsch cocktail lounge jazz in Sances's 'Presso l'onde tranquille', L'Arpeggiata's collective music-making tends to be judiciously text-driven, and is always sensuous. Indeed, there has been thoughtful preparation in all respects – from Alessio Ruffatti's erudite booklet note to the cover illustration of Domenichino's painting of King David playing the harp (1619) that belonged to Cardinal Mazarin while Rossi was in Paris. Incidentally, the same artist's frescoes of the life of St Cecilia are in Rome's San Luigi dei Francesi, where Rossi was organist. **David Vickers**

A Scarlatti

Il martirio di Santa Teodosia

Emmanuelle de Negri *sop* Emiliano Gonzalez Toro

ten Renato Dolcini *bar* Anthéa Pichanick *contr*

Les Accents / Thibault Noally

Aparté ⑤ AP232 (75' • DDD • T/t)



Reflecting contemporary iconography, female saints, virgins and

martyrs were irresistible subjects for Italian Baroque composers. Alessandro Scarlatti wrote four such oratorios, beginning with *Il martirio de Santa Teodosia*, possibly commissioned by a Roman patron in 1683 and certainly performed in Modena two years later. In the original sources the teenaged Theodosia of Tyre travelled from her native Lebanon to the city of Caesarea in Palestine, where she comforted Christian

prisoners awaiting execution. For her pains she was arrested, thrown to wild beasts and hurled into the sea, only to keep reappearing until the Roman governor Urbanus ordered her decapitation.

The (anonymous) libretto set by Scarlatti duly softens the original for refined aristocratic consumption. The focus in the first half of the story is on the unrequited love of the governor's son Arsenius for Theodosia. His confidant Decius tries to intercede on his behalf. Later Arsenius attempts to prevent Theodosia's death, but to no avail: she is determined to die a martyr and be blissfully united with God. A soberly fugal final *coro* points the moral: 'For one who dies for God, death is life.'

You'll look in vain here for the colour and harmonic daring of such later Scarlatti oratorios as *Cain, ovvero Il primo omicidio*. But there is plenty to relish in *Il martirio de Santa Teodosia*, cast in a style somewhere between the Italian oratorios of Carissimi and Handel. Arias tend to be short and strophic, recitative often flowers into arioso. There are songs of gentle longing for Arsenius, brief, vivid ensembles of confrontation, a tumultuous 'rage' aria for Urbanus and a jaunty song with solo violin for Decius. Theodosia herself – by far the largest role – has the two most substantial and poignant arias, one at the end of each part. Unfolding over a chromatically descending ground bass, her final 'Spirti beati' evokes Dido's Lament, composed within a year or two of Scarlatti's oratorio.

Emmanuelle de Negri sings this with a fragile, haunted tone apt to the mortally wounded heroine. Elsewhere she brings both grace and passion to a role that ranges from contemplative ecstasy (say, in the plaintive, Purcellian 'Mi piace il morire') to the fiery resolve of 'All'armi ò costanza'. In song and recitative her words always tell. Her colleagues, all good Baroque stylists, make worthy partners. The tenor Emiliano Gonzalez Toro brings a tenderly rounded tone to the role of the unhappy Arsenius. Renato Dolcini is formidable without bluster as Urbanus, while Anthéa Pichanick, with her androgynous contralto (you could easily mistake her for a countertenor), impresses as the ever-optimistic Decius. Bass lines sometimes seem over-weighted, especially in slower numbers. This proviso apart, Thibault Noally directs with dramatic flair and secures crisp, thoroughly idiomatic playing from his expert period ensemble. No one with a taste for Baroque oratorio need hold back.

Richard Wigmore

C Shaw

Is a Rose^a. *The Listeners*^b

^aAnne Sofie von Otter *mez* ^bAvery Amereau *contr*

^bDashon Burton *bass-bar* ^bCaroline Shaw *tape*

Philharmonia ^b**Chorale and Baroque Orchestra / Nicholas McGegan**

Philharmonia Baroque © PBP12 (51' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at First Congregational Church, Berkeley, CA, March 9-10, October 19-20, 2019



Having first made quite an impression back in 2013 with the strikingly original

Partita for 8 Voices, followed last year by *Orange* – an hours' worth of music for the Attacca Quartet (a Nonesuch and New Amsterdam records co-release, 8/19) – this new disc sees the American composer draw on both voices and strings in two new works, recorded live with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale.

The song-cycle *Is a Rose* features Shaw's by now trademark technique of placing familiar musical objects in unfamiliar contexts. Setting words by Robert Burns, the contemporary poet Jacob Polley and Shaw herself, pop-song-like inflections and melodic shapes are melded with PBO's period-instrument, rosin-tanned timbres and brittle harpsichord to create a subtly arresting musical alchemy. This reflective backdrop provides Anne Sofie von Otter's resonant mezzo voice with enough time and space to weigh up each word and line with delicate nuance – from the folklike innocence of Burns's 'Red, red rose' to the Broadway lilt of 'And so'.

An altogether more dramatic and dynamic approach is taken in the other work on this recording, *The Listeners*. Described by Shaw as a latter-day oratorio, this 35-minute work for two soloists, chorus and orchestra takes as its starting point the Golden Records – the two gold-plated phonograph records that were launched into deep space by Voyager spacecrafts in 1977, containing music and messages that might one day be intercepted by extraterrestrial life forms. Tapestry-like in design (excerpts from the recordings themselves are heard in 'Greeting', in addition to the voice of Carl Sagan – the scientist who spearheaded the Golden Records project – in 'That's us'), *The Listeners* makes particularly effective use of the low-lying ranges of contralto Avery Amereau and bass-baritone Dashon Burton. Amereau adds vivid operatic splashes of colour to 'In world's vast frame', while gravitas and solemnity imbue Burton's enunciation of Whitman's

'Let your soul stand cool'. Shaw draws on PBO's more expanded forces of voices, winds, brass and percussion to create a vivid space-inspired soundscape that's replete with pulsing patterns, propulsive pitch-cycles and harmonies that zoom – Doppler-like – into focus, before receding rapidly again into the distance. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Somervell

Maud. *A Shropshire Lad*. *A Kingdom*

by the Sea. *Shepherd's Cradle Song*

Roderick Williams *bar* **Susie Allan** *pf*

Somm © SOMMCD0615 (62' • DDD • T)



Hubert Parry thought very highly of his pupil Arthur Somervell (1863-1937), singling

out for approval one of his early settings ('Marie at the Window') in the context of an article on English song published in 1888 that mentions 'very young rising composers ... who have a healthy feeling for declamation of their own language, and are capable of being inspired by genuine poetry, and doing things which are musically interesting and refined'. Ten years later, the publication of Somervell's song-cycle based on Tennyson's emotionally charged monodrama *Maud* (No 6, 'Maud has a garden', was withheld until the 1907 revised edition) brought him acclaim – deservedly so given its melodic fecundity, tenderness of expression and shrewdly plotted scheme, allied to a most satisfying thematic resourcefulness that attests to its creator's familiarity with, say, Schumann's *Dichterliebe* and Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte*. Superbly partnered by Susie Allan (whose deft touch and ingratiating tone are a constant source of pleasure), Roderick Williams gives an outstandingly sympathetic rendering, his consistently perceptive characterisation especially potent when the darkly oppressive tenor of the opening song ('I hate the dreadful hollow') returns with a vengeance from No 10 ('The fault was mine') onwards.

Maud proved a tough act to follow, and while there are many incidental felicities to be found in Somervell's tastefully wrought *A Shropshire Lad* from 1904 ('White in the moon the long road lies', for instance, is as touching as it is haunting), Housman's rueful melancholy barely registers; in fact, the whole sequence inhabits a by and large serenely untroubled landscape far removed from the piercing intensity of those inspired settings to come by Butterworth, Vaughan Williams, Gurney and Ireland.

(The actual tunes, I should add, do securely lodge in the brain.) Once again, no criticism can be levelled at Williams and Allan, who also lavish affectionate advocacy upon both *A Kingdom by the Sea* (a mellifluous adaptation from 1901 of four stanzas from Edgar Allan Poe's *Annabel Lee*) and 'Shepherd's Cradle Song' (a bewitching lullaby inscribed to the American soprano Lillian June Bailey).

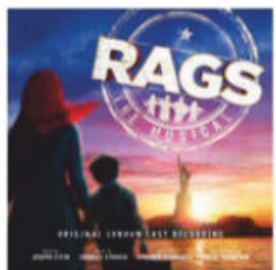
Boasting astute and thought-provoking essays by Jeremy Dibble and Roderick Williams himself, as well as complete texts, Somm's presentation leaves nothing to be desired. Pleasingly rich sound and truthful balance, too. **Andrew Achenbach**

Strouse

Rags: The Musical

Original London Cast

Ghostlight © 2-643409 (66' • DDD)



I have always been unreasonably fond of Charles Strouse and Stephen Schwartz's

Rags and would have given my right arm to have seen the great Teresa Stratas as Rebecca at one of the handful of performances (it ran for only four) she gave on Broadway. She doesn't even feature on the original cast album; Julia Migenes stepped in to replace her.

In some ways Joseph Stein's original book was a natural sequel to his *Fiddler on the Roof*, tracing the immigrant experience all the way to the New World and Manhattan's cramped Lower East Side. But epics sometimes grow bigger and stronger for losing ballast and gaining intimacy and David Thompson's revised book for *Rags* – in collaboration with Strouse and Schwartz – invades the privacy of one particular family better to understand their hopes and fears, their trials and tribulations.

I saw the show at London's tiny Park Theatre after it transferred from the Hope Mill in Manchester and what worked especially well for me was the integration of Strouse's score into the fabric of the drama using actor/musicians onstage as an extension of the core ensemble off. In that regard music director/arranger Nick Barstow is the real hero of the hour, doing a marvellous job of 'klezmerising' the score so that a solo fiddle, a clarinet, a trumpet, an accordion project more sharply that homespun *tinta* that gives the music its character and makes it so much more immediate. Like the characters themselves, the score is a melting pot of styles embracing folksy ethnicity alongside

the burgeoning American trends of jazz and ragtime. 'Blame it on the summer night' moodily, seductively sings the blues but the reach of its 'release', which I adore, conveys a yearning that goes far deeper. I love too the bitter twist on the American Dream projected through the edgy cynicism of the title song, and the duet 'Wanting' for Rebecca and Saul has that indescribable Strouse 'ache' omnipresent through all his scores.

This excellently produced cast album is in some ways a better experience than the show itself because it exposes fewer of its shortcomings and reveals more of its heart. I'm still not convinced that the big ballad 'Children of the wind' needed moving from its auspicious position early in the show to the eleven-o'clock number spot. The original verse remains where the whole song once sat but the rest of it – the chorus – is now far too close to the final reprise and for my money greatly diminishes its impact. Even so, Carolyn Maitland (Rebecca) gives a storming account of it. It is the show in microcosm.

Edward Seckerson

Ilker Arcayürek

'Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen'

Brahms Neun Lieder, Op 63 – No 8, O wüsst ich doch den Weg zurück; No 9, Ich sah als Knabe Blumen blühn **Hristić** Elegija **Lehár** Erste Liebe. Wenn ein schöne Frau befiehlt **Liszt** Im Rhein, im schönen Strome, S272 **Mahler** Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen. Rückert Lieder – No 4, Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen **Milojević** Jesenja elegija **I Weber** Wiegala **Wolf** Italienisches Liederbuch – No 7, Der Mond hat eine schwere Klag' erhoben. Mörike Lieder – No 32, An die Geliebte

Ilker Arcayürek *ten* **Fiona Pollak** *pf*
AVI-Music © AVI8553409 (61' • DDD)



The Istanbul-born, Vienna-based tenor Ilker Arcayürek's Schubert-only debut was well received in these pages, earning an Editor's Choice (Champs Hill, A/17). This new album, recorded the following year, has waited a couple of years for its release. It looks back even further: to the young singer's triumph at the International Art Song Competition of the Hugo Wolf Academy in Stuttgart, capturing the programme that Arcayürek and his pianist, Fiona Pollak, developed at the time. It makes for a delightful album, taking core Austro-Hungarian repertoire as its basis but pushing out, too, to further corners of the former empire.

We start and end with Mahler, and the opening performance of the songs that give the album its title shows off the same easy, instinctive manner that characterised Arcayürek's Schubert. That's not to say, though, that he doesn't rise to the drama: his voice, though fundamentally lyrical in character, takes on an extra steel – with hints of a Peter Schreier-like edge to the sound – in 'Ich hab' ein glühend Messer'. The two Lehár numbers are a delight (why are his songs not programmed more often?), even if one notices a slight congestion in the tenor's tone here and there.

The other rarities are wonderful, too: a haunting pair of Elegies by Croatian composers new to me, and Ilse Weber's heartbreaking 'Lullaby' (also memorably done, with guitar rather than piano accompaniment, on Anne Sofie von Otter's 'Terezín/Theresienstadt' album – DG, 10/07). Others have perhaps brought more interpretative colour and variation to Wolf, Liszt and Brahms than Arcayürek does to his selection here but his singing is always appealing, his interpretations admirably honest. And a gentle, heartfelt performance of 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' provides a touching conclusion to a lovely album. **Hugo Shirley**

'Cantos sagrados'

Biebl Ave Maria **Ešenvalds** Amazing Grace
MacMillan Cantos sagrados **Musgrave** On the Underground, Set 2: The Strange and the Exotic
Whitacre Leonardo Dreams of his Flying Machine. When David heard **Tippett** Five Spirituals from A Child of our Time
National Youth Choir of Scotland; Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Christopher Bell
Signum © SIGCD604 (64' • DDD • T/t)



'What did you say?', the opening phrase of James MacMillan's *Cantos sagrados*

abruptly demands. But the answer here is in absolutely no doubt. From that first earth-shattering orchestral down-beat, through the peremptory intensity of the repeated choral question, you are pinned in place, attention seized, ears ringing. Premiered in 1990, MacMillan's miniature cantata (lasting just 20 minutes) was originally scored for choir and organ. But in 1998 the National Youth Choir of Scotland's Christopher Bell commissioned an arrangement with orchestra and the thrilling, chilling result – recorded here for the first time, astonishingly – makes it hard



The Choir of Merton College, Oxford, bring a soft-edged blend to modern American choral music from Glass to Muhly

to contemplate ever returning to the original with its more subdued colours.

The NYCOS and Royal Scottish National Orchestra seize the possibilities of a piece so much bigger in stature than length and refuse to relinquish a moment of drama, articulation, contrast or precision. A work that marries political activism with faith pairs traditional spiritual texts with contemporary writing on the violent repression in Latin America. Tone jangles from ferocity, entries ricocheting to and fro, chatter building into collective rage, to lulling prayer and meditation. It's a supremely effective work impeccably delivered by these young and agile singers.

The choir's superb technique is even more evident in the two Eric Whitacre works – *Leonardo Dreams of his Flying Machine* and *When David heard*, with their demanding contrapuntal and textural effects. Light and gauzy in the former, rhythms beating engine-crisp, the choir come into their own in the sustained intensity of the latter – a setting of a single sentence from the Book of Samuel that packs a father's grief and guilt into just a few words.

Bell has chosen his programme carefully, finishing with Tippett's familiar Spirituals and Thea Musgrave's unexpected, aphoristic miniatures *On the Underground*, Set 2: *The Strange and the Exotic*, rounding it all off with a juicy encore in the form of Franz Biebl's unapologetically lush *Ave Maria*. What a treat. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Sleeper's Prayer'

Betinis Cedit, hyems **Glass** *Satyagraha* – Finale
D Lang *Again. if I sing. sleeper's prayer* **Larsen**
I will sing and raise a psalm **Muhly** *A Hymn on the Nativity. Rev'd Mustard His Installation Prelude. Senex puerum portabat. A Song of Ephrem the Syrian. Take Care Paulus The Road Home Traditional Deep river*

Choir of Merton College, Oxford /

Benjamin Nicholas *org* with **Claire Wicks** *fl* **Alex Little, Tom Fetherstonhaugh** *org* **Merton Brass**
Delphian © DCD34232 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Whether or not you like the typical American choral sound, there's no denying that it was made both by and for the music of America's contemporary composers. You can hear Randall Thompson, Lauridsen, Whitacre in its soft-focus blend and thicker textures, and it's a rare British choir that doesn't feel just a bit too thin, too precise, too correct delivering it.

Which makes this latest release from the Choir of Merton College, Oxford – a collection of modern American choral works – an interesting one. Music director Benjamin Nicholas has been canny in his choices, steering away from the lush end of the repertoire towards the leaner, more Anglican sound world of Nico Muhly and David Lang's angular minimalism.

Merton's relationship with Delphian extends back nearly a decade, and you can hear the changes under Nicholas's careful direction – in the softer-edged blend, the more bass-anchored sound. Both of which come in handy here, fostering the glow that suffuses Muhly's *Senex puerum portabat* as well as the rapturous close of Muhly's *A Song of Ephrem the Syrian* ('A wonder set apart yet received by our lips') and the all-important coda of Lang's Psalm 101 paraphrase *if I sing*, with its belated consolation and blessing.

There are a lot of arpeggios here, and the collection (which includes a generous handful of premieres) is at its best when it varies the pace. Abbie Betinis's *Cedit, hyems* shouts its difference in ear-catching textures and motifs; a haunting solo flute and icy chatter warm gradually into a pulsing dance, as winter gives way to spring. Muhly's enticingly titled organ toccata *Rev'd Mustard His Installation Prelude* adds some playfulness, while his setting of Ben Johnson's *A Hymn on the Nativity* takes us away from ostinato and into more rhetorical, responsive word-setting.

Only in the encore-like final track, the modern classic that is Stephen Paulus's *The Road Home*, do we miss the full-fat tones of a *Conspirare* or similar. Suddenly Merton's bright, youthful sopranos, so agile elsewhere, lack the control and heft for this uncompromising, affirmative simplicity.

Alexandra Coghlan

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month **Peter Quanttrill**'s point of departure is ...

Stravinsky's Oedipus rex (1927)

Jean Cocteau compared his 1922 French translation of Sophocles's *Antigone* to a photograph of Greece taken from an aeroplane.

No wonder Stravinsky turned to him three years later for a text based on 'a universally known tragedy of the ancient world'. A Latin translation was commissioned from Jean Daniélou to heighten the 'austere and solemn spirit' of the downfall of Oedipus, king of Thebes, and its religious overtones of fall and redemption, while placing the listener at a certain remove from its action – a tension encapsulated by its new 'opera-oratorio' designation. In performance, however, Cocteau and Stravinsky are both 'do as I say, not as I do' artists, instinctively inclined to turn the dramatic screw, which makes their 1951 recording such an absorbing experience, right from the spine-chilling call to attention of Cocteau's narrator.

● Sols; Cologne Radio Chor & SO / Igor Stravinsky (Sony Classical, 6/55)

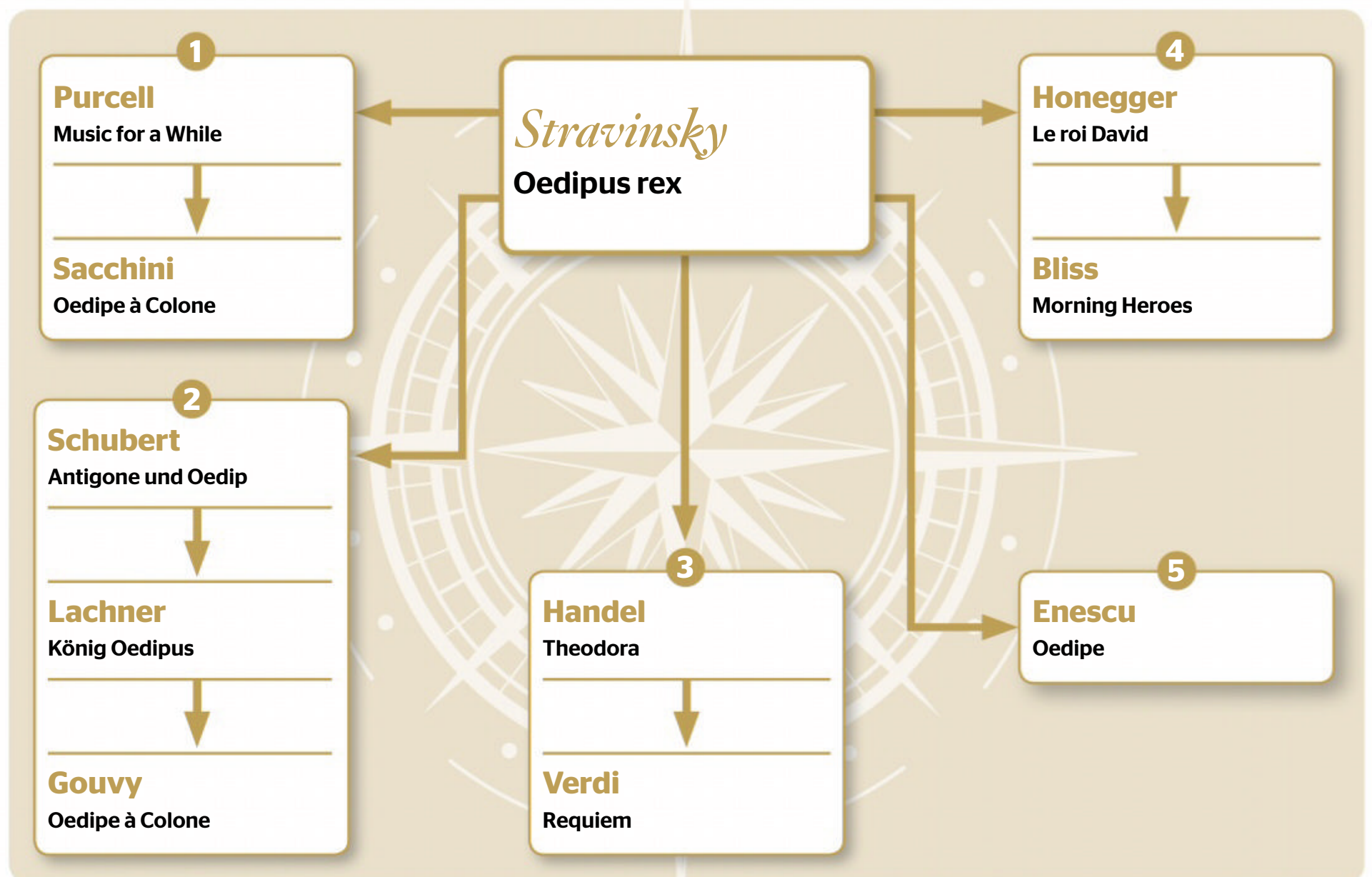
translation shared between John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee and first staged in 1678. Writing incidental music for the play's revival in 1692, Purcell accepted Dryden's invitation in the text to illustrate music's power to 'all your cares beguile', while the play's anti-hero awaits judgement from the Furies for his unwitting crimes. Thus the four-bar ground bass in this context dramatises not the reassuring rhythms of life but the ineluctable hand of fate.

● James Bowman *countertenor* Academy of Ancient Music / Christopher Hogwood (Decca, 3/82)

Sacchini Oedipe à Colone (1785) The downbeat ending to the first part of the Theban trilogy, with Oedipus sentenced to exile and the most uncertain of fates, attracted few full lyric settings before Stravinsky and Cocteau. Composers and impresarios were drawn more to the visionary third part, written shortly before Sophocles's death in 406 BC with a strong flavour of autobiographical catharsis and set in his birthplace of Colonus. In what became his own final work for the stage, Antonio Sacchini engineered an upbeat departure from the original, with a happy-

1 *Thebes to London, Colonus to Versailles*

Purcell Music for a while (1692) England's repressed Catholic past and its disturbing resurgence is the unspoken subject of the *Oedipus*





Hillemacher's 1843 depiction of Oedipus's exile from Thebes – the end of the first part of the trilogy

ending reconciliation between Oedipus and his son Polynices. Even so, the score's Gluckian beauties left Berlioz in tears.

● Soloists; Opera Lafayette Chor & Orch / Ryan Brown (Naxos, 12/06)

2 Oedipus in the 19th century

Schubert Antigone und Oedip (1817) It was above all his serious-minded lawyer friend Johann Mayrhofer who turned Schubert's gaze towards the ancient world. In March 1817, quite early in their acquaintance, they devised a duet setting of the king's arrival at Colonus. His daughter Antigone sets the scene before Oedipus determines to prepare for death – a Schubertian leitmotif – with grim resolve. Christoph Prégardien emulates the example of the song's dedicatee, baritone Johann Michael Vogl, in taking both parts.

● Christoph Prégardien *ten* Andreas Staier *fp* (Teldec, 1/02)

Lachner König Oedipus (1851) Spurred on by the fast-developing new science of classical philology as well as imperial ambitions, German courts and universities made a new home for Greek tragedy in the early 19th century. At the behest of the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV, Mendelssohn set choruses and composed interludes for the last two parts of the Theban trilogy, but Schubert's friend Franz Paul Lachner took a far bolder approach to the downfall of Oedipus, also supplying monodramas and dialogues for the main characters. There's also more than an echo of Cocteau about the linking narration on this fine recording.

● Speakers; Bavarian Radio Men's Chorus; Munich Radio Orchestra / Jörg-Peter Weigle (Audite)

Gouvy Oedipe à Colone (1880) Just under a century after Sacchini's opera for Marie Antoinette and Versailles, Louis Théodore Gouvy returned to Sophocles, and to Colonus, as a refuge of orchestral radiance, within a series of classically themed oratorios. Some unexpectedly confrontational harmonies – for the arrival of Polynices and the showdown with his now defiantly unreconciled father, with a large part played by a soprano Antigone – are dynamically underlined by this period-aware modern recording.

● Soloists; Kantorei Saarlouis; La Grande Société Philharmonique / Joachim Fontaine (CPO)

3 Opera-oratorio / oratorio-opera?

Handel Theodora (1749) At Glyndebourne (on film, also a short-lived CD), Peter Sellars and Lorraine Hunt Lieberson unforgettably crossed the permeable border between Handel's oratorio and opera genres with a staged version of his Christian tragedy. The librettist for his penultimate oratorio was another accomplished classical scholar, Thomas Morell; the pair chose to forgo grand set pieces in favour of a quiet, introspective idiom, often terse and even spare to a degree that anticipates Cocteau and Stravinsky.

● Susan Gritton *sop* Susan Bickley *mez et al*; Gabrieli Consort and Players / Paul McCreesh (DG, 12/00)

Verdi Requiem (1874) Almost 150 years on, Hans von Bülow's polemical swipe at an 'opera in church costume' has lost its force: that's how we like our Requiems. No matter that Verdi drew profoundly on sacred-specific tropes such as Gregorian chant, or that he follows Mozart and other distinguished predecessors in casting the bass as the voice of God and the soprano as the sacrificial victim, performance tradition has finished

the job with more or less stylishly applied masks of greasepaint.

● Sols; Teatro alla Scala Chor & Orch / Daniel Barenboim (Decca, 11/13)

4 Narrative voices

Honegger Le roi David (1923) The tale of another ancient king, the unique portmanteau form – this time a 'symphonic psalm' – and the important narrative presence (actor Stéphane Audel brings an unrivalled rhetorical flourish) all anticipate Stravinsky's *Oedipus rex*. Pairs and trios of clarinets in the 'unpolished and slightly barbarous' orchestration – Honegger's own words – look back to the world of *The Rite of Spring*, while the central conflict between pagans and Christians is shared with *Theodora*.

● Soloists; Youth Ch of the Vaudois National Church; Suisse Romande Orch / Ernest Ansermet (Decca, 7/57)

Bliss Morning Heroes (1930) In writing a requiem for his younger brother Kennard, killed in action in 1916, the return to Greek verse in translation (Homer's *Iliad*) and the uniquely emotive qualities of recitation served Bliss well in establishing a particular distance between composer, audience and material – not with the ironised, *Facade*-like language of quips and asides which had announced Bliss's arrival as a Francophile bad boy of London music in the 1920s in *Madame Noy* and *Rout*, but with a relationship paradoxically more universal and yet personal, invoked by the doomed Hector's farewell to his wife and son on the ramparts of Troy.

● Samuel West *spkr* BBC Sym Chor & Orch / Andrew Davis (Chandos, 11/15)

5 The full story

Enescu Oedipe (1931) With the seed sown by first seeing *Oedipus the King* in 1910, Enescu gestated a birth-to-death tale over the next 20 years. The reach of the opera's story (taking in a spectacular set piece meeting with the Sphinx) and its musical setting (modal, modernist-lyrical, bewitchingly scored) extends beyond the Theban trilogy to attempt a modern, Jungian vision of the king as an Everyman determined to make peace with his sins and himself.

● Soloists; Orfeón Donostiarra; Monte Carlo PO / Lawrence Foster (Warner Classics, 11/90)

Available to stream on Apple Music

Opera



Richard Wigmore hears a tribute to Mozart's first Queen of the Night:

'Sarah Traubel has the vocal equipment to tackle these coloratura showpieces, with a bright "pingy" tone and agile technique' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 82**



Mark Pullinger listens to a Russian-themed album from Karina Gauvin:

'There is plenty of bite to her soprano and a slight threat that it might just run off the rails in more frenzied moments' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 83**

Gluck • Handel

'Care pupille'

Gluck *Antigono* – Sinfonia; Berenice, che fai? ... Perché, se tanti siete; Già che morir. La Corona – Quel chiaro rio. La Sofonisba – Tornate sereni. Il Tigrane – Care pupille **Handel** *Arminio* – Quella fiamma. Atalanta – Care selve; M'allontano sdegnose pupille; Non saria poco. Berenice – Che sarà quando amante accarezza

Samuel Mariño *sop* **Halle Handel Festival**

Orchestra / Michael Hofstetter

Orfeo © C998 201 (71' • DDD)



Since Alfred Deller was 'discovered' by Michael Tippett in the 1940s,

countertenors have tended to get higher and louder. Many of today's star falsettists – Philippe Jaroussky, Max Emanuel Cenčić, Franco Fagioli – have the compass of a female mezzo. Higher still, the 27-year-old Venezuelan Samuel Mariño is an unequivocal soprano whose repertoire goes beyond the Baroque to include Oscar in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* and Fiorilla in Rossini's *Il turco in Italia*. For his debut CD he has alighted on (mainly) rare Handel and even rarer Gluck, in roles composed for either soprano castratos or (Berenice in Gluck's *Antigono*) women.

Mariño's flutey, feminine timbre (though you'd hardly mistake him for a female soprano), agile coloratura and ease above the stave immediately impress in a frisky aria from Handel's *Berenice*. In a rapt 'Care selve' from *Atalanta* he displays his command of *messa di voce* – the gradual swelling and ebbing of tone that was a touchstone of an 18th-century singer's technique – and a true trill, another 18th-century must-have. Mariño is good at refined delicacy, as in 'Già che morir' from Gluck's *Antigono*, later reworked as 'Che puro ciel' in *Orfeo*. (Like Handel, Gluck was an inveterate recycler.) Aptly for a man contemplating death, he sings this in a fragile, haunted *pianissimo*, the top Cs gently brushed within the melodic line.

In extrovert mode Mariño finds a metallic glint in the tone, whether jousting with solo oboe in a virtuoso showpiece from Handel's *Arminio* or vowing to risk his life for love in 'Care pupille' from Gluck's *Il Tigrane* – a brilliant performance of the aria that gives the disc its title. He reveals plenty of temperament, too, in a superb scena from Gluck's *Antigono* whose fast section draws on the gigue from Bach's B flat Keyboard Partita and later turns up as Iphigénie's 'Je t'implore, et je tremble' in *Iphigénie en Tauride*. Here and elsewhere the Halle period band give punchy, rhythmically precise support.

Reservations? Mariño is hardly shy over ornamentation, some of which, especially in cadenzas, seems self-regarding. When he ups the volume for intensity his vibrato can become intrusive – something to beware of in a young singer. At times, too, Mariño overdoes the dreamy languor, as in a graceful if overlong aria from Gluck's *La Sofonisba*. He might also learn a thing or two from Cecilia Bartoli, in her Gluck album (Decca, A/01), about colouring and projecting Italian words. But this is an accomplished, often exciting debut from a singer who must count as something of a vocal phenomenon. Orfeo's presentation includes plenty of photos of the visually marketable Mariño plus a decent booklet essay, but, true to form, no texts and translations. Nor will you find them online. Even if you have good Italian, you'll only pick up the general gist of what these arias are about. Depressingly predictable, but galling nonetheless. **Richard Wigmore**

Mascagni

Cavalleria rusticana

Melody Moore *sop*.....Santuzza

Roxana Constantinescu *mez*.....Lola

Brian Jagde *ten*.....Turiddu

Lester Lynch *bar*.....Alfio

Elisabetta Fiorillo *contr*.....Lucia

MDR Leipzig Radio Choir; Dresden Philharmonic

Orchestra / Marek Janowski

Pentatone © PTC5186 772 (66' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



After recordings of Wagner, Weber and Humperdinck for Pentatone, Mascagni

might seem like a bit of a detour for Marek Janowski, here at the helm of his Dresden orchestra. And it's fair to say that, though he directs an enjoyable, unfailingly musical account of the work, he hardly gets down and dirty with this prototypical *verismo* score.

At the centre of the recording, admittedly, there's a superbly hushed and moving account of the famous Intermezzo, and the playing of the violins, in particular, is unfailingly expressive. Janowski is best at capturing the score's gentle rusticity, as well its moments of sadness. He's big on forward momentum (this recording lasts a whole 15 minutes less than Karajan's famous DG account, for example) and unusually observant of Mascagni's markings.

That said, I find his decision to employ *ritardandos* in the big tune of the Brindisi only when they're explicitly marked – going against performance tradition, and not least against what Mascagni himself does in his 1940 recording – somewhat perverse. Elsewhere, several orchestral flourishes are either underwhelming or even scrappy, in the case of the violas' and cellos' chromatic run-up to Santuzza's 'A te la mala Pasqua'.

The conductor has gathered together three American principals who want nothing for decibels but are not always ideal. Melody Moore's Santuzza is the finest: it's a sympathetic characterisation and she sings generously and grandly, with plenty of rich, vibrant tone, even if I would like to hear more legato in her phrasing. Brian Jagde's Turiddu, though, is unvariegated and unstintingly loud, with a voice that is impressive in its volume but rarely seductive in its opaque tone. Lester Lynch is a solid Alfio but lacks dramatic and vocal incisiveness.



Christian Thielemann conducts a centenary production of Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* at the Vienna State Opera – see review on page 78

The other roles are well taken, and Pentatone's sound is airy and appealing. But as a whole this *Cav*, though often refreshing and affecting, isn't wholly convincing. **Hugo Shirley**

Massenet

Thaïs

Erin Wall *sop* Thaïs
Joshua Hopkins *bar* Athanaël
Andrew Staples *ten* Nicias
Nathan Berg *bass-bar* Palémon
Emilia Boteva *mez* Albine
Liv Redpath *sop* Crobyle
Andrea Ludwig *mez* Myrtale
Stacey Tappan *sop* La Charmeuse
Neil Aronoff *bar* Servant

Toronto Mendelssohn Choir; Toronto

Symphony Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos ② CHSA5258 (132' • DDD/DSD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Made in tandem with concert performances in Toronto last November, Andrew

Davis's recording of Massenet's great parable about sex and religion is the first to appear on CD since Yves Abel's much-

admired Decca set 20 years ago. Though not perfect, it has its advantages. Davis clearly has a great fondness for the score, which has been in his repertoire for some time now – he memorably conducted it at the 2011 Edinburgh Festival, also with Erin Wall as Thaïs – and his understanding of Massenet's often deliberate blurring of the dividing line between sensual and spiritual experience is unquestionably acute.

The playing is excellent, with a refined sensuousness of texture throughout, even in the opening scene among the Cenobites on the bank of the Nile. We're constantly reminded of how Massenet's post-Wagnerian chromaticism maps out the courses both of Athanaël's repressed desire and Thaïs's approaching sainthood, while the orientalisms seem properly woven into the work's fabric here, rather than imposed upon it simply as local colour. The big duets for the central couple have tremendous intensity, while the cataclysmic final interlude, in which Athanaël rushes headlong into a storm that mirrors the crisis within his own soul, is just thrilling.

Yet for all that, there are things that don't quite work. The brass sound too far forwards in the evocation of Alexandria that opens the second scene and we miss some of the richness of detail in strings and wind

that we find in Lorin Maazel's 1977 EMI recording with the New Philharmonia. Davis's tempo for Thaïs's 'Ô mon miroir fidèle' is on the slow side, which undermines its urgency. More detrimental, perhaps, is his decision – here, as in Edinburgh – to cut the Act 2 ballet virtually in its entirety (only the Charmeuse scene is retained), which comes dangerously close to pulling the act's structure out of shape, and means we also lose some of Massenet's most attractive dance music in the process.

Vocally, the set is strong, though in the exacting title-role Wall hasn't quite the vocal ease of Abel's Renée Fleming, with some strain in her upper registers, and the top D in the mirror aria ducked. Elsewhere, though, her tone is warm and beguiling, her dramatic commitment rarely in doubt. 'C'est Thaïs, l'idole fragile' in her opening scene has disarming poise, and there's a real surge of emotion at the climax of the Act 2 duet with Joshua Hopkins's outstanding Athanaël. His is a remarkable, unforgettable performance, sung with consistently expressive beauty, and quite superbly characterised, with every second of Athanaël's progress from prurient fanaticism to desire, atheism and despair registering with quite astonishing vividness.

There's some fine singing elsewhere, too. Andrew Staples makes an elegant Nicias, charming and vapid in this instance, rather than worldly wise. Liv Redpath and Andrea Ludwig are delightful as Crobyle and Myrtale, Nathan Berg does much with little as Palémon and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir remind us just how beautiful Massenet's often understated choral writing can be. The recording itself sounds sumptuous, though the orchestra occasionally at times threatens to overpower the singers at full throttle. It faces stiff competition, though, from Abel's set, less so from Maazel's, whose Thaïs, Beverly Sills, is by no means entirely persuasive – and both Maazel and Abel retain the ballet, giving us the score absolutely complete. Hopkins, however, makes the new recording more than well worth hearing, despite the occasional inequalities of the rest of it. **Tim Ashley**

Selected comparisons:

Maazel (1/77th) (WARN) 9029 58690-6

Abel (1/00) (DECC) 466 766-2DHO2

Moniuszko

The Haunted Manor

Tomasz Konieczny *bass-bar* **Miecznik**
Edyta Piasecka *sop* **Hanna**
Monika Ledzion-Porczyńska *mez* **Jadwiga**
Karol Kozłowski *ten* **Damazy**
Arnold Rutkowski *ten* **Stefan**
Mariusz Godlewski *bar* **Zbigniew**
Małgorzata Walewska *mez* **Cześnikowa**
Marcin Bronikowski *bar* **Maciej**
Rafał Siwek *bass* **Skotuba**
Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir;
Orchestra of the 18th Century / Grzegorz Nowak
 Fryderyk Chopin Institute © ② NIFCCD084/5
 (147' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



This fantastic series of Moniuszko operas with period-instrument orchestras continues apace with *Straszny dwór* (*The Haunted Manor*), a four-act work written in 1861-62. The very first chords of this work shout 'comic opera', but the magnificent notes included in the accompanying book (it can hardly be called a booklet!) explain in great detail the nationalist background to libretto and music – the apparently broken clock that regains its vitality is a symbol of the desire for the revival of Polish identity in times of subjugation to Russia, and there are innumerable musical references to Polish marches and dances.

What strikes one apart from this, however, is Moniuszko's musical language. As in *Flis*, one seems to move with ease from the world of Beethoven to those of Tchaikovsky and Verdi, and the articulation and phrasing of the Orchestra of the 18th Century bring the necessary clarity without sacrificing any expressive depth. None of this is intended to imply, incidentally, that Moniuszko was a derivative composer. On the contrary, his music partakes of its time and is given an extra layer of interest and colour by the significance of the Polish elements.

The libretto for this work is, naturally, in Polish, and the cast of Polish singers is very strong indeed. Bass-baritone Tomasz Konieczny as Miecznik and soprano Edyta Piasecka as Hanna are particularly impressive, but in fact the sense of ensemble is so strong that it seems invidious to single out particular singers: try the beginning of Act 1 scene 3, for example, which after one of Moniuszko's lovely plaintive introductions features the gorgeous trio of Arnold Rutkowski, Marcin Bronikowski and Mariusz Godlewski arriving at their ancestral home, or the powerful soliloquy of Stefan (Rutkowski) which constitutes Act 3 scene 4.

Grzegorz Nowak directs with conviction and verve, and the recording, made at Polish Radio in 2018 and 2019, is superb.

Ivan Moody

R Strauss

Die Frau ohne Schatten

Stephen Gould *ten* **Emperor**
Camilla Nylund *sop* **Empress**
Nina Stemme *sop* **Barak's Wife**
Wolfgang Koch *bass-bar* **Barak**
Evelyn Herlitzius *sop* **Nurse**
Sebastian Holecek *bass-bar* **Spirit Messenger**
Chorus and Orchestra of the Vienna State Opera / Christian Thielemann
 Orfeo © ③ C991 203 (3h 29' • DDD)
 Recorded live, May 25, 2019
 Includes synopsis



The Vienna State Opera's centenary production of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* last year was inevitably one of the hottest tickets of the Straussian calendar. In the event, Vincent Huguet's production was a disappointment. Not so Christian Thielemann's conducting of a State Opera Orchestra on breathtaking form, presenting the vast score uncut for the first time in the house where it was unveiled in October 1919.

A century ago, the theatre assembled a cast of legendary names, and the work's performance history is studded with starry casts. Thielemann's line-up, featuring three singers who sang for him in Christoph Loy's 2011 Salzburg Festival production, can't really compare. Nevertheless, Camilla Nylund is probably today's reigning Empress, bringing shining tone – more silver than steel – to a role she's made her own. She's a moving, committed performer, too, fearless in the role's extremes (the top Cs and D flat are cleanly hit) and in its dramatic demands: listen to her great final scene, replete with powerfully delivered melodrama.

Nina Stemme is predictably fine as the Dyer's Wife, too, offering the necessary powerful integrity to counter the character's less appealing traits. Evelyn Herlitzius, Thielemann's Färberin in Salzburg, transitions to the Nurse here – with moderate success. She's a compelling actress but some words fall foul to her unusual vocal production and she simply doesn't have the notes for the role's lower reaches.

The Emperor and Barak are the same as in Salzburg: Stephen Gould is remarkably solid but lacks grace for the Emperor's cantilena and is now stretched rather more by the role's extremes; Wolfgang Koch remains an eminently likeable Dyer, with impressive legato and a seemingly endless top to the voice, but one misses a certain bite and edge in his smooth bass-baritone. The subsidiary roles, led by Sebastian Holecek's incisive, powerful Spirit Messenger, are well filled.

The chief glory, however, is undoubtedly the conducting and playing. Before the first night, Thielemann had apparently suggested he might conduct the quietest performance of the work ever, and perhaps no performance (certainly on disc) is more adept at capturing the filigree and transparency of Strauss's music describing the spirit realm; more concerned with making the singers – and their words – audible; or more observant of the score's dynamic gradations, especially in not letting *ff* routinely balloon into *fff*.

Even more so than in Salzburg, the conductor is happy to let wordy moments trundle by without drawing undue attention to the musical details. He displays remarkable patience and large-scale judgement in pacing each of the grand acts, concentrating on structural coherence and saving himself for the big moments that really matter. Those moments are delivered powerfully, even if for me the grand final climax is somewhat marred by the over-dominant thumping of the timpani.

And it's testament to the Vienna State Opera Orchestra that they not only sound magnificent in the climaxes but that they are able to execute all Strauss's notes with such delicacy in the lighter passages. It goes without saying that the solo contributions – the big moments for the principal cello and violin – are superbly done. The live sound reflects the theatre's acoustic (detailed, a touch dry) and by and large the voices are captured remarkably well, with only occasional stage noises audible. This is essential listening for anyone interested in this remarkable work. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

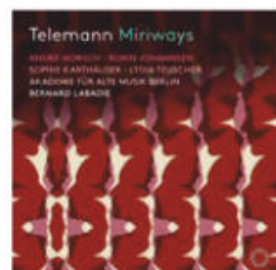
Thielemann (8/12) (OPAR)

DVD OA1072D; **Blu-ray** OABD7104D

Telemann

Miriways

André Morsch *bar*.....Miriways
Robin Johannsen *sop*.....Sophi
Sophie Karthäuser *sop*.....Bemira
Lydia Teuscher *sop*.....Nisibis
Michael Nagy *bar*.....Murzah
Marie-Claude Chappuis *mez*.....Samischa
Anett Frisch *sop*.....Zemir
Dominik Köninger *bar*.....Spirit/Scandor
Paul McNamara *ten*.....Messenger
Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin / Bernard Labadie
 Pentatone ® ② PTC5186 842 (154' • DDD)
 Recorded live at the Laeishalle, Hamburg,
 November 24, 2017
 Includes libretto and translation



In all but name, *Miriways* is a German-language *opera seria*, with a happy ending after the characters have confronted – not too seriously, admittedly – the problem of love versus duty. Premiered on May 26, 1728, it was one of the many operas that Telemann composed for the Theater am Gänsemarkt – the Goose Market – in

Hamburg. Unusually, the subject was drawn not from ancient history or myth but from recent events. In 1722 a seven-month siege of Isfahan led to the downfall of the Persian Safavid dynasty. The invader was an Afghan prince from Kandahar. His name was Mahmud, while one of the ousted shah's sons was called Safi: it is they who appear in the fictional story of the opera. Safi is called Sophi – no problem there – but the librettist gave Mahmud the name of his real-life father, Mir Wais, who had died in 1715.

Now concentrate, because this is where things get complicated. The opera's *Miriways* (pronounced, roughly, Mirry-Vice) is not married to his lover Samischa, because his father requires him to marry into the Mogul royal family. However, they have produced a daughter who, unaware of her parentage, has been brought up as the sister of Nisibis. *Miriways* wants his intended successor Sophi to marry his daughter; but Sophi refuses, as he is in love with Bemira. (Johann Samuel Müller, the librettist, quite fails to exploit the irony of the situation.) Of course, Bemira and *Miriways*'s daughter are one and the same. The other love interest is between the widowed Nisibis and the Tartar prince Murzah, brother of Samischa. Nisibis is also pursued by Zemir, a Persian prince, who behaves badly but is not really a villain. So, nobody dies.

Müller's stagecraft is pretty feeble. Bemira has been separated from her parents since infancy, yet there is no joyful reunion. After three occasions on which he claims the credit for what Murzah has done, the jealous Zemir avoids a duel by running away – no aria of defiance or remorse – never to be seen again. The action proceeds through the familiar sequence of *secco* recitative and aria (all but two are *da capo*); there's one duet, and an accompanied recitative – all 27 seconds of it – for the ghost of Shah Abbas the First.

The music is attractive but, on the whole, bland. Once in a while Telemann will do something unexpected, such as the fading away when Nisibis falls asleep, or the teasing hemiolas of Zemir's 'Die Dankbarkeit wird dich verpflichten'. The aria where *Miriways* rails at Sophi for his ingratitude starts dramatically with no introductory ritornello; later on there's some fine contrapuntal writing for the strings. The orchestration includes flutes and oboes d'amore, which sometimes double the vocal line; a bouquet especially for Erwin Wieringa and Miroslav Rovenský for their virtuoso horn-playing.

The cast is uniformly excellent. The track list indicates that several numbers have been omitted, so it's impossible to tell whether the original balance of arias has been maintained. *Miriways* has the most but the action is really centred on the two pairs of young lovers. André Morsch brings such authority to the part as the music allows. The other baritone, Michael Nagy, sings tenderly when observing Nisibis asleep, and is suitably virile when challenging Zemir. In the trouser role of Sophi, Robin Johannsen is also heroic, but finds a touching wistfulness in the aria that concludes the second act. Nisibis rejects Zemir's attentions with roudades expertly dispatched by Lydia Teuscher. Bad boy Zemir, another soprano role, has some of the best music: Anett Fritsch delivers a spirited aria mocking his rival, and relishes the syncopations of 'Die Dankbarkeit'. Sophie Karthäuser sings her two arias so appealingly that it's a shame there's no love duet for Bemira and Sophi.

No complaints about Bernard Labadie and the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, nor about the live recording: the only applause comes at the end of each act and after the sole comic turn, Scandor's drinking song. The libretto includes passages of recitative that are not actually sung. One of them, 'I fell asleep in a seat, as I wanted to be frisky this morning', gives

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Emotive performances: the countertenor Franco Fagioli showcases the prolific Neapolitan composer Leonardo Vinci

you a good idea of the ineptitude of the translation. Another example is Samischa's 'My sororal heart elates'. And it is extraordinary that, for an opera set among the superb Islamic monuments of Isfahan, the sole illustration in the booklet should be of ancient Persepolis. **Richard Lawrence**

Vinci

'Veni, Vidi, Vinci'

Alessandro nell'Indie - Vil trofeo d'un'alma imbelli. **L'Ernelinda** - Nube di denso orrore; Ove corri? Ove vai? ... Sorge talora fosca l'aurora; Sull'ali del suo amor. **Gismondo re di Polonia** - Nave altera, che in mezzo all'onde; Quell'usignolo ch'è innamorato. **Medo** - O da me troppo offesa ... Sento due fiamme in petto. Scherzo dell'onda instabile. **La Rosmira fedele (Partenope)** - Barbara, mi schernisci. **Siroe re di Persia** - Gelido in ogni vena. **Il trionfo di Camilla** - Più non so finger sdegni; Sembro quell'usignolo

Franco Fagioli *countertenor*

Il Pomo d'Oro / Zefira Valova *vn*

DG © 483 8358GH (71) • DDD

Includes texts and translations



Contrary to the chronic pun, Vinci neither composed an opera about Julius

Caesar nor conquered Britain – although some of his music was performed in London by Handel, who also borrowed a few ideas from works by the younger Calabrian musician. Franco Fagioli presents a dozen selections from seven different operas that stretch from 1725 to 1730, covering an assortment of orchestrations, moods and dramatic situations. Just over half of the arias have never been recorded before.

The title-role in *Il trionfo di Camilla* (1725) was originally sung by the soprano Faustina Bordoni: Il Pomo d'Oro's crisp playing, directed by violinist Zefira Valova, is a vivacious foil to Fagioli's powerful coloratura in 'Sembro quell'usignolo'. Vitige's double despair at an angry lover and a former friend is conveyed in a punchy *accompagnato* and trippingly elegant simile aria 'Sorge talora fosca l'aurora' (*L'Ernelinda*, 1726); Fagioli's agility across wide leaps, vividly spinning timbre and bold execution of copious fast trills are also fully to the fore when expressing Vitige's optimism that storms will pass ('Nube di denso orrore'). Cosroe's guilty terror that he will be haunted by the ghost of an innocent son ('Gelido in ogni vena') was originally sung by a tenor (*Siroe*, 1726), but its vocal part is transposed up an octave for Fagioli's emotive performance.

'Quell'usignolo ch'è innamorato' (*Gismondo re di Polonia*, 1727) has two lively sopranino recorders chirruping in partnership with Fagioli's imitation of a nightingale, supported by elaborate extemporised solo flourishes from the harpsichordist; 'Nave altera, che in mezzo all'onde' (another aria originally for tenor) is a thrilling outburst with a pair of braying horns. 'Barbara, mi schernisci' (*La Rosmira fedele*, 1725), a gutsy minor-key outburst for Arsace complaining that Partenope mocks his love, is performed with jagged bitterness. Alexander the Great's tour de force 'Vil trofeo d'un'alma imbelli' (*Alessandro nell'Indie*, 1730) pits Fagioli's full-frontal volatility against valorous trumpets and thunderous timpani. There are two dissimilar scenes sung originally by Farinelli as the hero Jason in *Medo* (1728): the stormy *aria di bravura* 'Scherzo dell'onda instabile', sung as he steers a damaged ship to shore, and 'Sento due fiamme in petto', featuring melodious solo oboe over pizzicato basses and bowed upper strings, as Jason contemplates polyamorous feelings for Medea and his new flame Enotea (actually Medea in disguise). More complete Vinci opera recordings of this high calibre are needed.

David Vickers

'Arias for Josepha'

'Mozart's First Queen of the Night'

Haibel Der Tyroler Wastl – Alles will ich brechen, beugen **Mozart** La clemenza di Tito – Ah perdona al primo affetto^a. Die Entführung aus dem Serail – Martern aller Arten. Le nozze di Figaro – E Susanna non vien! ... Dove sono; Porgi amor. Schon lacht der holde Frühling, K580. Die Zauberflöte – Der Hölle Rache; O zittre nicht **Righini** La sorpresa amorosa, ossia Il natale d'Apollo – Bella fiamma; Ove son? Qual aure io spiro **Schack/Gerl** Die beiden Antone, oder Der Name thut nichts zur Sache – Auch im Schlummer seh' ich dich **Süssmayr** Der Spiegel von Arkadien – Juno wird stets um dich schweben **Winter** Das Labyrinth, oder Der Kampf mit den Elementen – Ha! Wohl mir! Höre es Natur! **P Wranitzky** Oberon, König der Elfen – Dies ist des edlen Hüons' Sprache

Sarah Traubel *sop* ^a**Deniz Uzun** *mez*

Prague Philharmonia / Jochen Rieder

Sony Classical © G010004268253X (70' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



'A lazy, coarse, shifty character, cunning as a fox' was Mozart's crisp verdict on

Josepha Weber in a letter to his father of December 1781, when he was eager to promote his future bride Constanze as the flawless Cinderella among the Weber sisters. Aloysia, his first love, was simultaneously branded 'false, malicious, and a coquette'. As so often, we sense that Wolfgang was merely telling the ever-suspicious Leopold what he wanted to hear. He remained friendly with Josepha and Aloysia, professional singers both, writing arias for them that exploited their coloratura prowess. Most famously, he created the role of the Queen of the Night for Josepha Hofer, as she now was, at Schikaneder's Theater auf der Wieden. Eager to capitalise on the runaway success of *Die Zauberflöte*, Schikander then commissioned Peter von Winter to composer a sequel, *Das Labyrinth*, for which Josepha reprised her role of the malignant queen, complete with vote-catching top Fs.

In tandem with the musicologist Christian Moritz-Bauer, the young German soprano Sarah Traubel has devised a tribute act that embraces many of the roles Josepha sang at the Theater auf der Wieden. Amid familiar Mozart we get, inter alia, a brace of arias by the now virtually forgotten Bolognese Vincenzo Righini, an aria by Jakob Haibel, who later married Josepha's youngest sister Sophie (as Leopold feared, there was no

escaping those Weber girls), and a solo from Paul Wranitzky's magic opera *Oberon*, a possible influence on Schikander's libretto for *Die Zauberflöte*. It would be nice to report revelations here. But for all their fireworks and (above all in the Winter and Righini arias) colourful orchestration, there remains a vast gulf between Mozart and these assorted *Kleinmeister* in harmonic inventiveness, melodic allure and sheer compositional sophistication. Mozart invariably makes coloratura an agent of drama and/or (in the Queen of the Night's arias) parody. In other hands – not least those of 'that idiot' (Mozart's words) Franz Süssmayr – it too easily becomes mere vacuous display.

Sarah Traubel certainly has the vocal equipment to tackle these coloratura showpieces. Her bright, 'pingy' tones and agile technique immediately impress in Haibel's mock-heroic aria proclaiming women's sexual power ('Men are putty in our hands') and a Righini aria with obbligato flute and oboe. Traubel is never less than accomplished, soaring confidently above the stave, pitch-perfect in the staccato scales and arpeggios in which Josepha specialised. Yet in the Mozart arias, especially – where other sopranos inevitably echo in the mind's ear – she never quite satisfies. The Countess's two solos (which Josepha performed in German) need more tonal depth and warmth than Traubel can muster; and in a gamely sung 'Martern aller Arten' from *Entführung* she is not the first soprano to sound like an over-promoted Blonde. Both here and in the *Zauberflöte* arias she is prone to moments of shrillness (her final top B flat on 'Hört' in 'Der Hölle Rache' sounds strained rather than commanding) and never makes enough of her consonants – a recurrent problem throughout her recital, in both German and Italian.

These provisos apart, there's plenty to admire in Traubel's snapshot of Josepha's repertoire at the Theater auf der Wieden. The Prague orchestra, slightly backwardly recorded, are faithful accompanists, though more than once Jochen Rieder sets a tempo that can't be sustained when the rapid coloratura kicks in. The ordering of items can seem random – why, for instance, do the two Queen of the Night arias not follow one another, ditto the Countess's arias? In compensation, there's an informative note from Marcus Felsner that neatly summarises Josepha's career and, crucially, sets each number in its dramatic context. **Richard Wigmore**

'Desire'

Bizet Carmen – Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante

Cilea Adriana Lecouvreur – Ecce: respiro

appena ... Io son l'umile ancella **Dvořák** Rusalka

– Song to the Moon **Leoncavallo** Pagliacci –

Qual fiamma avea nel guardo! ... Hui! Stridono

lassù **Moniuszko** Halka – Dzieciątko nam

umiera ... O mój maleńki **Puccini** Madama

Butterfly – Un bel di vedremo. Tosca – Vissi

d'arte. Turandot – Signore, ascolta! **Tchaikovsky**

Eugene Onegin – Letter Scene **Verdi** Ernani –

Surta è la notte ... Ernani! Ernani, involami.

Il trovatore – D'amor sull'ali rosee. I vespri siciliani – Mercè, dilette amiche

Aleksandra Kurzak *sop*

Morphing Chamber Orchestra / Frédéric Chaslin

Sony Classical © 19075 88326-2 (66' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



For her first solo album in seven years, Aleksandra Kurzak makes a move into

some unexpected repertoire. Her previous album (Decca, 6/13) was a *bel canto* showcase; here she dips a toe – if not a whole foot – into classic *spinto* repertoire, presenting some unexpectedly hefty Puccini and Verdi assignments alongside roles in French, Czech, Russian and, in the album's highlights, her native Polish.

In many ways it's impressive, and she does a good job of everything she sings here – within the limitations imposed by her neatly produced, flexible but hardly luxurious voice. Her Adriana Lecouvreur is a touch indulgent but she offers smartly controlled accounts of 'Vissi d'arte' and 'Un bel di', although I can't imagine we'll be hearing her in *Tosca* or *Butterfly* in the theatre any time soon.

The same goes for the soprano leads in *Il trovatore*, *I vespri siciliani* and *Ernani*: the voice isn't what we're used to here, but Kurzak offers pinpoint, lightweight but pleasing performances of 'D'amor sull'ali rosee' and the *Vespri* Bolero (including a short but sweet top E); her 'Ernani! Ernani, involami' makes it sound more than ever like the *Traviata* Brindisi. Even if the top sparkles, though, and Kurzak musters plenty of focus in her middle range in the Verdi and Puccini, as well as in a moving Letter Scene from *Onegin*, one inevitably misses an extra heft and colour in the voice.

She's more fully convincing as a sparky Nedda and offers a touching, moving account of Rusalka's Song to the Moon, as well as a well-schooled account of Micaëla's Act 3 aria from *Carmen*. And no one should miss her heartbreaking performance of the tragic heroine's final aria from *Moniuszko's Halka*.



Sarah Traubel sings roles sung by the coloratura soprano Josepha Weber, a contemporary of Mozart who was the first Queen of the Night

With sensitive support from Frédéric Chaslin and the Morphing Chamber Orchestra, this is an enjoyable album that points in intriguing new directions for this ever-appealing artist. **Hugo Shirley**

'Nuits blanches'

'Airs d'opéra à la cour de Russie au XVIII^e siècle'

Berezovsky Demofonte - Mentre il cor;
Misero pargoletto **Bortnyansky** Alcide - Dei clementi; In qual mar; Mi sorprende. Le faucon - Overture; Ne me parlez point **Dall'Oglio** Sinfonia Cossaca - Allegro **Fomin** Les cochers au relais - Overture **Gluck** Ah! si la liberté!; Armide - Enfin, il est en ma puissance ... Ah! Quelle cruauté de lui ravir le jour!; Oh ciel, quelle horrible menace; Le perfide Renaud me fuit

Karina Gauvin sop **Pacific Baroque Orchestra** / **Alexander Weimann** fp

ATMA Classique © ACD2 2791 (57' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



It was in 2014 that Cecilia Bartoli donned her faux fur hat and headed to

St Petersburg to unearth Baroque and Classical treasures at the court of Catherine the Great, mostly by imported Italian composers (Decca, 11/14). Now the Canadian soprano Karina Gauvin follows

in Bartoli's footsteps in the snow for an attractive programme, originally given in concert in Vancouver. The 'Nuits blanches' title references the *Belye noch*, or White Nights, when the sun never quite sets over the city of St Petersburg.

The subtitle 'Opera arias of the Russian Court in the 18th century' is a little foggy, though. Unlike Bartoli, Gauvin does feature music by composers of the Russian Empire – Dmitry Bortnyansky and Maxim Berezovsky – although two of the operas represented here were composed and premiered during their time studying in Italy. And a large section of the disc is given to arias from Gluck's *Armide* – music of the 18th century, certainly, but not actually performed in St Petersburg during Catherine's reign. The booklet writer claims that Berlioz introduced it to Russian audiences long after Gluck's death. But David Cairns, in the second volume of his Berlioz biography, *Servitude and Greatness, 1832-1869*, notes that although excerpts from *Armide* were planned as part of his six-concert St Petersburg programme, they were substituted by Act 1 of *Alceste*. Berlioz certainly championed Gluck's operas though, writing to his niece, Joséphine Chapot, 'What a joy to introduce a people to works of such beauty! The Russians do not know Gluck!'

Gauvin's Gluck is particularly classy, especially the Act 2 recitative and aria

'Ah! Quelle cruauté de lui ravir le jour!', supported by the piquant winds of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra. There is plenty of bite to her soprano and a slight threat that it might just run off the rails in more frenzied moments of 'Le perfide Renaud me fuit' (a good thing), where the horns and timpani thunder forcefully. These moments of aggression are welcome as, apart from an injection of vigour in Yevstigney Ipatyevich Fomin's overture to *Les cochers au relais*, most of the works have a more relaxed air. There's certainly nothing to match Bartoli's spitfire Russian in Raupach's 'Razverzi pyos gortani, laya', which still rattles me nearly six years on. Indeed, it's a shame there's no Russian heard at all here. Even the promisingly titled *Sinfonia Cossaca* by Domenico Dall'Oglio is dressed in polite court manners, with barely a whiff of stroganoff.

Of the vocal music by the Russians, Berezovsky's is the more interesting, with two well-crafted arias from *Demofonte*. Bortnyansky, best known as a prolific choral composer, is represented by music from *Alcide* and a French *opéra comique*, *Le faucon*. The Pacific Baroque Orchestra under Alexander Weimann are sensitive partners, the flutes especially buttery. There's much to enjoy here, but don't come expecting the revelations that Bartoli uncovered. **Mark Pullinger**

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Daniel Hersog Jazz Orchestra

Night Devoid of Stars

Cellar Music CM051119



Daniel Hersog, a Vancouver-based trumpeter-composer, is the latest in a line of contemporary Canadian big band arranger-leaders, which includes Ingrid Jensen, to follow in the legendary footsteps of Gil Evans. He's the central influence on *Night Devoid of Stars*, a title lifted from Martin Luther King Jr's very topical speech that stresses the danger of violence leading to more violence. Although Evans is the standout influence, Hersog's music has a strong character of its own and the younger man eschews close emulation of his hero. The 16-piece orchestra contains the cream of Hersog's fellow countrymen and the leader's arrangements create some

open-ended possibilities for his soloists, notably trumpeter Brad Turner, while Noah Preminger impresses with some loosely inventive solo tenor sax playing. The only cover, Jerome Kern's 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes', is given the Gil Evans treatment, with its dark-hued drone feature. A mature, superbly crafted statement that doesn't sound anything like a debut. **Selwyn Harris**

Maria Schneider

Data Lords

Artistshare



While Maria Schneider's last album, the critically acclaimed *The Thompson Fields*, came in pastel shades, reflective moods and a wistful evocation of an idealised 'Heimat'; *Data Lords*, in contrast, releases what Schneider calls her 'inner beast'.

It contains her most powerful writing yet – the ominous rising tension of the title track, the dark, brooding 'A World Lost' or the powerful 'Don't Be Evil'. It's an album raised in protest at the steadily accumulating power of the seemingly unaccountable data lords – Google, YouTube, the social media giants and the music streaming services who believe music should be 'free' and so barely reward what they call the 'content producers', i.e., the musicians. This is Schneider's first vinyl release, a double LP package and on the second album she celebrates switching off her devices, letting her brain recover from the constant bombardment of the information age to celebrate the simple things in life – space, silence, the earth and the sky. Quite simply, this is a classic, music that will be played, studied and enjoyed for decades to come.

Stuart Nicholson

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

SHIRAN

Glsah Sanaanea with Shiran

Batov Records



Albums of music from Yemen emerge rarely in the West; albums of Yemeni women singers are rarer still and we have had to wait decades for anything of this quality. Shiran's family were among the 50,000 Yemeni Jews airlifted to Israel in 1948; many have kept their culture alive in their new home, passing songs and stories down the generations. Yemen's place at the crossroads between Africa and Arabia gives its music a distinctive energy that singers like Ofra Haza and the girl group A-WA harnessed to good effect with club remixes.

Shiran did this on her debut but what makes her new release so exciting is that she has now stripped traditional songs back to

their original instrumentation and the un-plugged sound is even more dynamic. Special mention should be made of Shauli Itzhak's oud playing and the sinewy vitality of this – along with qanun, kawala (flute), strings and percussion – perfectly complements Shiran's strongly expressive voice. You may never get to experience the intense thrill of a khat-fuelled hafla (party) in Sana'a or Tel-Aviv, but with Shiran you can get some of the way there with your headphones! **Bill Badley**

Shirley Collins

Heart's Ease

Domino Records



In 2016, one of the more remarkable musical comebacks came with the release of *Lodestar*, Shirley Collins's first recordings for 38 years. Now she has returned to the

studio (*Lodestar* was recorded at home) with the same band to record *Heart's Ease*. Where *Lodestar* was a thrilling, dark, austere return, *Heart's Ease* is leaps and bounds ahead in terms of Collins's performances. Indeed, this is one of her greatest albums, the equal to her much-loved classics of the 60s and 70s, and her voice is strong and compelling.

She eschews sentiment to draw out the epic reaches these traditional songs contain – whether that's a crisp, inexorable 'Barbara Allan', 'The Merry Golden Tree' (AKA 'The Golden Vanity'), or 'Wondrous Love', a song she first heard while field recording with Alan Lomax. There are lyrics from her first husband, producer and poet Austin John Marshall, and a song ('Locked in Ice') by her late nephew, Buz Collins. The intriguing instrumental closer, 'Crowlink', mixes field recordings and the ambiances of hurdy-gurdy and fiddle to atmospheric effect. More please. **Tim Cumming**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Celebrating Glorious John

Rob Cowan listens to Barbirolli's collected recordings from the UK and US

What a joy this 'task' has been. The first disc I auditioned from the superbly remastered Warner Classics set was Jon Tolansky's excellent documentary, which at one point uses as an illustration Sir John Barbirolli's sumptuous second Hallé recording of Elgar's Second Symphony. 'The essence of what Barbirolli was about', I thought to myself; warm, glowing, full of appropriate sentiment and with an uncommonly generous expressive range. An earlier (mono) Hallé Second hits its target with rather less obvious affection, though the tautly projected third and fourth movements are undoubtedly impressive. It soon transpires that there isn't just one Barbirolli but many. There's a plethora of material to cover here: I can't mention absolutely everything, obviously, but I'll do what I can.

Prior to the release of Warner's epic collection, Sony Classical issued the conductor's 'The Complete RCA and Columbia Album Collection' with the New York Philharmonic. Interesting that in the case of Sibelius's Second Symphony, Barbirolli's swift, keenly driven performance of May 1940 may well have been influenced by Toscanini's broadcast of the same work in the same city with the NBC Symphony from the previous February. Two years later Barbirolli's New York reading of the First achieves rather more repose, though without losing tension. His Hallé recordings of Sibelius for Warner major on atmosphere, especially the beautifully engineered 1960s symphony set. A stereo Fifth from 1957 is rather spoilt by closely spotlit wind and brass interjections in the first movement but both versions of the Seventh are tellingly built (the first especially) and there's a fine Second from 1952, with a strikingly broad denouement to the finale.

Beethoven is represented on Warner by various works, including a spacious *Eroica* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra

and a resplendent Hallé *Emperor* with Mindru Katz. Evocatively played French repertoire by, among others, Debussy, Berlioz and Ravel offers evidence of Barbirolli's part-Gallic roots. Other New York highlights include an account of Schubert's Fourth that perfectly captures the work's melancholy spirit, again without compromising on energy, though two quite different versions of the *Great C* major in the Warner set provide further food for critical thought. Both make a heady beeline for the opening movement's excited transition from *Andante* to *Allegro ma non troppo* but come the second movement, it's the slower, later version that more suggests a *Winterreise*-style trudge through snowy climes. Brahms's symphonic works with the Vienna Philharmonic tend towards autumnal understatement, the Third being a highlight, although a Hallé predecessor is more impassioned, a Hallé Fourth more bracing. Tchaikovsky and Dvořák symphonies (Nos 4-6 and 7-9 respectively) are red-blooded, though I found both the Hallé and (far earlier) New York versions of *Francesca da Rimini* wanting for tension.

*It soon transpires
that there isn't just one
Barbirolli but many*

One of the few conductors of modern times whose approach to Elgar equals Barbirolli's for pushing the music beyond our national boundaries is his one-time musical collaborator Daniel Barenboim (featured here in big-boned accounts of the two Brahms piano concertos). The chosen soloists in Elgar's Cello Concerto will likely appeal to contrasting temperaments: André Navarra for restrained intensity and Jacqueline du Pré for emotional candour. The First Symphony is handsomely served in 1962 by an expertly balanced Philharmonia but it's the sonically less sophisticated 1956 Hallé version that spins

the truer narrative, especially at the point in the finale where key material is heard at half speed accompanied by harp arpeggios: here the Hallé strings surpass themselves, complete with singing portamentos. The 1956 *Enigma* is again in my view the most compelling (of three options).

Perhaps Barbirolli's leisurely choices of tempo for the five completed *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches (with the New Philharmonia) were aimed at divesting the music of unfashionable jingoistic associations but for me the newsreel-style excitement achieved by Norman Del Mar (RPO, DG Eloquence) and indeed Elgar himself hits the nail more securely on the head. *Cockaigne* better suits our French-Italian cockney; and of the five featured versions of the *Introduction and Allegro* for strings I'd rate the third (Hallé) and the last (Sinfonia of London with the Allegri Quartet) as the most gripping, though I should also steer you towards Barbirolli's 70th-birthday concert (one of countless invaluable Barbirolli Society releases, this one newly out on SJB1098/9) which features what's possibly the most thrilling performance of all. Recordings of Strauss (Johann and Richard) and Wagner attest to the conductor's heart on sleeve, though the sleeve still manages to cue dashing performances.

Vaughan Williams is represented by a bold performance of the highly inventive Eighth Symphony, which was dedicated to Barbirolli, as well as Symphonies Nos 2, 5 and 7, the first two in alternative mono and stereo tapings. Vaughan Williams was a great fan (you can hear him movingly present Barbirolli with the Royal Philharmonic Society Award on a bonus disc) and as evidence I'd especially cite the *London Symphony* (either version), the Fifth, the *Tallis Fantasia* (the stereo option in particular) and *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus*. But the British axis doesn't end there. Important mono recordings of Bax's Third and Rubbra's



A man of many parts: new sets from Warner and Sony represent the range of Barbirolli's musical sympathies

Fifth Symphonies impress with their strong sense of place and time, and there are memorable performances of sundry other British works, Barbirolli's Delius (there's a fair amount of it, the expansive *Appalachia* being a highlight) opting for a warmly sensual approach where Thomas Beecham was more piquantly aromatic.

Mahler was a relatively late arrival to the Barbirolli canon, fellow cricket fan Neville Cardus being a major prompt in this respect, and the resulting versions of Symphonies Nos 1, 5, 6 and 9 are nothing if not charged with feeling. Sidling off to shorter pieces – of which a great many are included – I'd especially recommend a Hallé disc of Suppé overtures, vividly engineered by Mercury Living Presence masterminds Wilma Cozart and Harold Lawrence and capturing performances of the utmost brilliance.

Readers who like to explore beyond the relative audio comfort of digital, stereo and mono tape are served by 26 discs' worth of transfers from shellac, some of the material never previously transferred by the Warner team, in any form, or at least not to the best of my knowledge. I have to say that for the most part Studio Art et Son have done a fabulous job with the transfers. One especially instructive comparison is provided by Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, with soloists Mischa Elman (1929) and Jascha Heifetz (1937). Quite how Barbirolli followed Elman's unconstrained rhapsodising is anyone's

guess (actually in one or two places he doesn't, quite) but I defy any dedicated fiddle-fancier to resist Elman's heart-stopping tone, either here or in the Bach E major Concerto, where between them Elman and Barbirolli make the slow movement sound like romantic Passion music. Heifetz of course was quite another matter, equally impassioned it's true, but also exceedingly brilliant, well-disciplined and always dead in time – in fact a dream to accompany, at least that's what I'd imagine. We're also given Heifetz/Barbirolli versions of Glazunov's Concerto, Vieuxtemps's Fourth (with its treacherous Scherzo), Wieniawski's Second, Mozart's Fifth and some shorter showpieces. Did Heifetz ever make recordings that were better than these? Some would say not. Yehudi Menuhin arrives in New York on Warner playing Schumann's then newly discovered Concerto, recorded neck-and-neck with Georg Kulenkampff in mainland Europe and just as impactful.

And there are the piano concertos, most tellingly Mozart, Barbirolli and his orchestras adjusting to the styles of each player: bright and sprightly for Rubinstein in No 23, appropriately rapt for the slow movement of No 22 with Edwin Fischer, and in the parallel movement of No 27 with Artur Schnabel achieving a genuine sense of stillness. Interestingly, Barbirolli's wartime New York recording of the same work with Robert Casadesu (Sony) features a significantly faster slow

movement, as is fitting for this pianist's more classical performing style.

Also worth comparing, Rubinstein and John Ogdon in the Tchaikovsky B flat minor and Rubinstein and Alfred Cortot in Chopin's Second. And singers? Iconic recordings of complete works with Janet Baker (Mahler, Ravel, Berlioz and Elgar song-cycles, as well as Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*) and such opera giants as Carlo Bergonzi and Renata Scottò (*Madama Butterfly*), Montserrat Caballé and Fiorenza Cossotto (Verdi's Requiem), James McCracken, Gwyneth Jones and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (Verdi's *Otello*) are well enough loved to need no endorsement from me. But have you ever heard the pre-war live *Turandot* excerpts (Covent Garden, May 1937) with Eva Turner and Giovanni Martinelli? Dusty as sound, it's true, but truly electrifying. When it comes to magnificent solo vocal sides – arias, scenes, etc – featuring the likes of Elisabeth Schumann, Florence Austral, Lily Pons, Beniamino Gigli, Giovanni Inghilleri, Ina Souez, Aureliano Pertile, Feodor Chaliapin, Walter Widdop (some arresting Handel), Browning Mummery, Joseph Hislop, Richard Crooks, Lauritz Melchior, Friedrich Schorr (neither singer confined to Wagner only), Arthur Fear (a vibrant Welsh baritone who sings his arias in English), Peter Dawson and various others, Barbirolli's role here is less interpretative than supportive. A bonus disc includes a first release of the second part of *Gerontius* recorded with Hallé forces, tenor Parry Jones and contralto Marjorie Thomas in 1951, an emotionally charged rendition, very much of its time stylistically, but somewhat spoilt by intrusive acetate crackle for the work's rapt closing minutes.

As to the listening process, that's simple in the case of the relatively concise six-disc Sony box, and with the Warner set use the booklet as an index then select a numbered disc and Malcolm Walker's expert discographical information will tell you all you need to know. Both collections include excellent essays (Raymond Holden for Warner, James H North for Sony) but it goes without saying that if you have to choose – and you can raise the rearies (about £150 of them) – Warner Classics' 109 CDs will offer you a lifetime's worth of musical joy and stimulation. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

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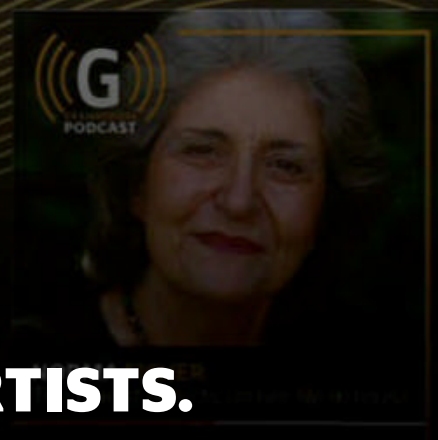
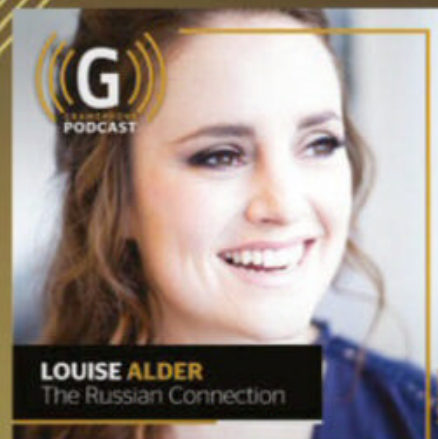
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New music trailblazers

Richard Whitehouse hears a collection of works by leading composers of the last century

It may now be several decades past but the Twentieth Century Composers Series, sponsored by the Fromm Music Foundation of Chicago, blazed a trail for the promotion of contemporary music whose influence continues to be felt up to the present and hopefully into the future. Paul Fromm had been an advocate for new music since his formative years in Germany and set up his foundation in 1952 to commission, perform and record works by mainly American composers. This series, issued during 1956-63, wholly embodies Fromm's guiding principles.

Disc 1 focuses upon Leon Kirchner, pupil of Roger Sessions and admirer of Berg, whose aesthetic is exemplified by his *Sonata concertante* (1952) and the First Piano Trio (1954). A formidable pianist, Kirchner joins Eudice Shapiro then Nathan Rubin and George Neikrug in works of granitic force and muscular energy which do not preclude a more yielding lyricism. Disc 2 couples choral works liturgical only by name: Wilhelm Killmayer's *Missa brevis* (1954) combines sung and spoken elements in a visceral take on its text, while Lou Harrison's *Mass* (1939/52) ingeniously combines Amerindian chant and medieval plainsong to fervent and haunting effect, at least as rendered by the New York Concert Choir and Margaret Hillis.

Disc 3 finds the Juilliard Quartet in its initial heyday tackling the First Quartet (1952) by Benjamin Lees, typical of his earlier music in its sinewy part-writing and tensile Classicism, then the Second Quartet (1952) by William Denny, closer to Bartók in harmonic astringency and rhythmic impetus. Disc 4 has the New Music Quartet (with such as violinist Matthew Raimondi and viola player Walter Trampler) in the First Quartet (1953) by Jerome Rosen, another figure whose academic role overshadowed his creative output, and the String Quartet (1947) by İlhan Usmanbaş – 99 this year and mainly resident in Istanbul – whose similar predilection for Hindemith is allied to an expressive force that recalls Ernest Bloch's then eminence.



Disc 5 centres on Ernst Krenek, his multifaceted idiom at its most uncompromising with *Sestina* (1957), a scena whose demands are fulfilled by Bethany Beardslee. A startling stereo transfer makes the mono sound of *Lamentatio Jeremiae Prophetae* (1942) feel murky, a pity when the Dresden Kreuzchor and Martin Flämig probe the intricacy of music whose luminous white-note serialism proved influential. Disc 6 is given over to Ben Weber, his idiosyncratic serial thinking typified in the terse variation sequence of *Fantasia* (1946), superbly played by pianist William Masselos. The Galimir Quartet is no less assured in the Chamber Concertino and Serenade for Strings (both 1956), their neoclassicism by turns sardonic and engaging.

Disc 7 is devoted to song-cycles by Luigi Dallapiccola, the translucent beauty of whose *Cinque Frammenti di Saffo* (1942) and expressive allure of *Due Liriche di Anacreonte* (1945) are eloquently rendered by Elisabeth Söderström. The baritone Frederick Fuller does justice to the rigorous *Cinque Canti* (1956), as does Söderström to the aphoristic *Goethe-Lieder* (1953) and plangent *Concerto per la Notte di Natale dell'anno 1956* (1957). Frederick Prausnitz and the composer direct vital readings in what is a viable overview of the latter's stylistic evolution.

Disc 8 turns to Elliott Carter, this first recording of whose Double Concerto (1961) still astounds with the visceral interplay between piano, harpsichord and two chamber orchestras, Charles Rosen and Ralph Kirkpatrick duly locking horns under the astute guidance of Gustav Meier. In the US this came in harness with Kirchner's Chamber Concerto (1960), music of Berg-like density and richness; the UK coupling was Rosen's first account, more fluid while less imposing than it became, of Carter's Piano Sonata (1946). Both works are included here.

The last discs post-date Fromm's recording project but his foundation sponsored both pieces by Lukas Foss on Disc 9. *Echoi* (1963) finds this composer and pianist at his most radical, the Group for Contemporary Music rising to its challenges, while the Improvisation Chamber Ensemble are no less assured in *Time Cycle* (1960), poems by four varied English and German authors set with an insight that soprano Grace-Lynne Martin fully conveys. Leon Fleisher's recital on Disc 10, made just before he lost use of his right hand, is a classy bonus. Copland's Piano Sonata (1941) and Kirchner's First Sonata (1948) have seldom been equalled for their emotional intensity, while the pungency of Sessions's *From My Diary* (1940) or deft insouciance of Ned Rorem's *Three Barcarolles* (1949) further confirm this pianist's all-round versatility.

Presentation is comparable to previous Sony collections, with its reproduction of each album sleeve (including liner notes for those with appropriate magnification) and detailed overview by Anne C Shreffler alongside full track-listings and recording details. Ultimately, the project confirms Fromm's belief that for listeners to come to terms with new music, the need remains 'to sense its message and to get to know its gestures as he knows the gestures of a friend'. **G**

THE RECORDING

Fromm Music Foundation:

Twentieth Century Composers Series

Sony Classical © 10 19439 71564-2

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Those were the days

Years ago, a reviewer friend once gently took me to task, quipping about my love of vintage recordings with the phrase 'nostalgia isn't what it used to be'. The truth is that 'nostalgia' is one thing, the process of delving to discover something 'old' that's also 'new', ie new to me (or you for that matter), quite different. And it's that stimulating process that I'm most wedded to. Decca Eloquence's recent trawl of Tchaikovsky twofers is a case in point. But more about that in a moment. First **Prokofiev**, two discs that open to a 1949 *Peter and the Wolf* with narrator Frank Phillips epitomising what the term 'received pronunciation' means, a formal commentator who you could imagine facing the microphone donning a dinner jacket and bow tie. It's a crisp, fairly formal voice, expertly used, and the London Philharmonic under Nikolai Malko offer Phillips characterful, well-played support. What follows, however, is quite exceptional: the Fifth Symphony recorded in 1952 by the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Erik Tuxen, a forceful, clear-headed performance that promotes the composer's taut arguments with absolute conviction. Adrian Boult conducts the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra in a genial early stereo *Lieutenant Kijé* Suite (the jingly 'Troika' is especially jolly) and, with the LPO (in mono), the *Love for Three Oranges* Suite, slightly less distinctive but good nonetheless. Add bracing, well-recorded (stereo) Paris Conservatoire accounts of the Seventh Symphony (with its alternative 'carefree' ending) and the conceptually similar *Russian Overture* under Jean Martinon and you have a thoroughly enjoyable package.

Boult Conducts Tchaikovsky includes one of the most compelling versions of the *Polish* Symphony around (LPO), vintage though it is (1956, in mono rather than the alternative primitive stereo version), the opening *Allegro* full of fire, the *Andante elegiaco* deeply expressive. Boult's Paris stereo recording of the Third Orchestral Suite features the superb violinist Pierre Nerini, whereas the chattering Scherzo is more taut than on the conductor's otherwise excellent LPO remake (Warner, especially

in the central section, from around 1'30") and the finale, again, bursts with life. Mischa Elman's signature sobbing tone is instantly recognisable in the Violin Concerto, though his ravishing pre-war version under John Barbirolli (in Warner Classics' Barbirolli box – see page 86) is technically stronger. *Hamlet* and *1812* are well observed and fairly transparent, the latter ending with plenty of pomp and grandeur, though there's little evidence of a cannon.

Anatole Fistoulari's ballet music package is especially memorable, including as it does vivid, incisively played LSO versions of the *Nutcracker* Suite and Serenade for Strings that I'd never heard before. A 49-minute LSO *Sleeping Beauty* sequence might lack the drama of Fistoulari's abridged version of the complete ballet (6/19) but it sounds amazingly lifelike and the solos are sensitively handled by the violinist Hugh Maguire and cellist Kenneth Heath. The superbly engineered and thrillingly conducted Concertgebouw *Swan Lake* selection has already been issued by Eloquence. Again, it features wonderful solos (the violinist Steven Staryk and cellist Tibor de Machula) but I wish Fistoulari hadn't abridged the finales of both big ballets.

As to the later symphonies, Eloquence has treated us to two versions of the Fourth. The earlier of the two (1949) has **Erich Kleiber** on excitable form conducting the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra, coupled with the conductor's stirring, well-judged 1953 Paris *Pathétique* and Ruggiero Ricci's first (1950) Decca London recording of the Violin Concerto, altogether less febrile than his stereo remake which, as here, is conducted by **Malcolm Sargent**.

The second Eloquence Fourth is a memorable 1959 Ray Minshull Paris Conservatoire production featuring **Albert Wolff**, whose discography includes a benchmark Paris recording of Glazunov's *The Seasons*, Bizet's complete *L'Arlésienne* incidental music in the context of Alphonse Daudet's play (both for Decca; the former scheduled for release as part of an Eloquence all-Wolff box-set, probably during next year, the latter now on Accord) and the gripping premiere recording of

Albert Roussel's Third Symphony (with the Lamoureux Orchestra, originally for Polydor and transferred to CD on the Timpani label). Wolff's Fourth opens forcefully, a mood he maintains more or less for the duration; and while some of the woodwind filigree (from, say, 4'58") wants for delicacy, the first movement in particular really does work well. The movement's close sees Wolff rushing the tremolando bridge to the coda; Kleiber, like Mengelberg and others, stops dead before resuming for the final chase. The *Andantino* is especially lovely (superb flutes).

Two earlier Paris recordings under the usually sober **Carl Schuricht** are well worth hearing: an uncharacteristically festive-sounding *Capriccio italien* and the Theme and Variations from Suite No 3, I'm assuming with Nerini playing the solos again – he was the orchestra's concertmaster at the time. When the 'Dies irae' motif appears on the brass, Schuricht has his players blare with a vengeance. As for **Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt's** 1952 Hamburg Radio Symphony Orchestra recording of the Fifth Symphony, I affectionally recall the much-missed Ted Greenfield's neat adage regarding the same conductor's Vienna Philharmonic Decca taping of Beethoven's *Choral* Symphony – 'a Ninth to live with'. Here, as there, dignity is the keyword, the rugged, broad-shouldered (cut) finale far removed from the dazzling fast-lane antics of, say, Mravinsky. I loved Schmidt-Isserstedt's patience, thoughtfulness and musicality, though I know that on some occasions I'll crave something rather more animated. All the transfers are excellent and so are the annotations.

THE RECORDINGS



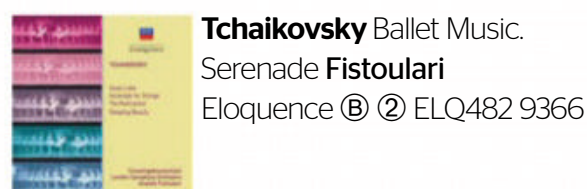
Prokofiev *Peter and the Wolf*, etc
Malko, Tuxen, Martinon, Boult
Eloquence ⓑ ② ELQ484 0357



Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 3.
Suite No. 3. Violin Concerto
Elman, Boult
Eloquence ⓑ ② ELQ484 0381



Man of many talents: Hamilton Harty was as fine a pianist as he was a composer and conductor



Tchaikovsky Ballet Music.
Serenade **Fistoulari**
Eloquence B 2 ELQ482 9366



Tchaikovsky Symphonies
Nos 4 & 6. Violin Concerto
Ricci, E Kleiber, Sargent
Eloquence B 2 ELQ484 0373



Tchaikovsky Symphonies
Nos 4 & 5. Orch Wks **Wolff,**
Schuricht, Schmidt-Isserstedt
Eloquence B 2 ELQ484 0407

Majestic Mengelberg

Mention of Willem Mengelberg brings me to a splendid new double pack from Pristine Audio devoted to shorter works recorded between 1926 and 1935 with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, and superbly refurbished by Mark Obert-Thorn (whose transfers of much the same material also feature in a three-disc set from Pearl, alongside music by Wagner and Brahms). The present set's crowning glory is what is in my opinion the greatest recording ever made of a Liszt tone poem, one where the cut and thrust of the playing (especially from the strings and brass), the ease of passage between sections and the resplendent closing pages are captured in sound that is light years ahead of its time. The work is *Les préludes* and Mengelberg's approach melds ardour, atmosphere and an imposing sense of drama. Mounting excitement also distinguished Cherubini's *Leonore*-like *Anacréon* Overture and a

sequence of Beethoven overtures: *Leonore* Nos 1 and 3, *Coriolan* (the latter included twice – try track 13 on disc 1 for the more imposing option) and *Egmont* (again, two versions – the one that opens the second disc is the one to go for first). In *Coriolan* the sensitive and impassioned way Mengelberg traces and shapes the work's principal theme is a miracle to behold. A trio of Weber overtures (*Der Freischütz*, *Euryanthe*, *Oberon*) is hardly less remarkable, the last-named quite magical: listen to how the woodwind figurations near the start of the piece flutter across the sound canvas, or the way Mengelberg ratchets up the tension (and pushes the tempo) for the closing pages. Two versions of the Scherzo from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are incisively played (I rather prefer the second featured version), though heaven knows why Mengelberg made a senseless small cut in the piece. Even more curious is his elephantine reading of Bach's Second Orchestral Suite, where a distant organ provides an eerie backdrop. Transforming the *St Matthew Passion* into virtual music drama (as Mengelberg was wont to do) is one thing but lending Bach's dance music Tellytubby garb and flat feet is quite something else. In other respects, this is a truly marvellous set.

THE RECORDING



Columbia Recordings, Vol 1
Concertgebouw Orch /
Mengelberg
Pristine Audio M 2 PASC595
www.pristineclassical.com

The inspiring baton of Hamilton Harty

Few conductors of the past mark a greater contrast with Mengelberg than the Irish composer-conductor (organist and pianist too) Hamilton Harty, the majority of whose recorded performances sound like live concerts. Pristine's compilation of Harty in British music opens with Bax's fun-filled *Overture to a Picaresque Comedy*, where the LPO's playing is as vivid as virtually anything you're likely to hear under Beecham's baton. The rest of the programme features a game but rather less refined Hallé Orchestra. Harty's own masterfully scored 'poem for orchestra' *With the Wild Geese* suggests feelings of the Irish regiments – the Wild Geese of the title – who fought for France at the Battle of Fontenoy in 1745. Harty's performance combines vigour, keen sentiment and an obvious appreciation of the Irish muse, who is invariably present throughout the piece. That same muse informs Harty's quite gorgeous elaboration of *Londonderry Air* (the excellent violin soloist isn't named) and the Scherzo from his *Irish Symphony*.

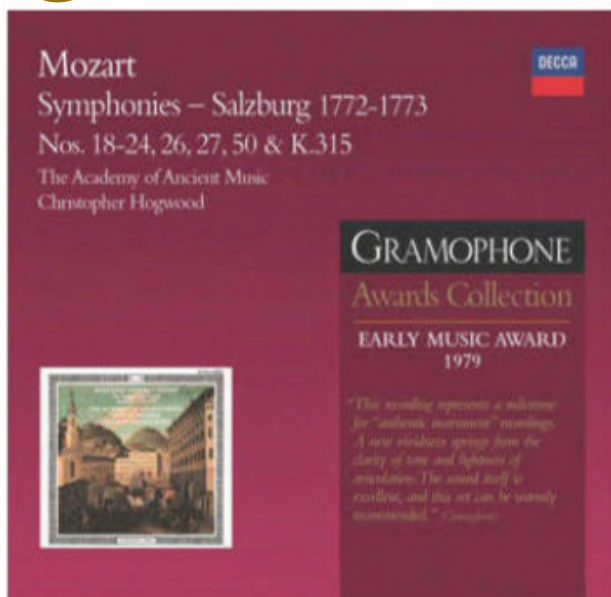
Perhaps the disc's highlights feature music by Elgar, 'By the Wayside' from *The Apostles* (with Dora Labette, Hubert Eisdell, Dennis Noble, Robert Easton, Harold Williams and the Hallé Chorus), *Dream Children* and, most especially, the *Enigma* Variations which, while occasionally rushing headlong into momentary confusion (witness the ragged strings in 'HDS-P' on track 11), is often thrilling ('Troyte' on track 16), even charming ('Dorabella', track 19, with its subtle lilt anticipating Toscanini). 'Nimrod', which is very flexibly phrased and features copious portamento, truly stirs the soul, whether on its own terms or when woven majestically into the work's finale. I loved this performance, which is as bold, headstrong and dedicated as the fallen who are so often commemorated by the work's noblest moments. You'll find tidier performances elsewhere but none that hits the emotional mark more pointedly or honestly than does Hamilton Harty. Mark Obert-Thorn's transfers are, as expected, state-of-the-art.

THE RECORDING



Music of the British Isles
Hallé Orch, LPO / Harty
Pristine Audio M PASC592

Classics RECONSIDERED



David Vickers
and **Lindsay Kemp**
reappraise the Academy of
Ancient Music's pioneering
period-instrument
recording of Mozart's
Salzburg symphonies



Mozart

Symphonies: Salzburg, 1772-1773

Academy of Ancient Music / Jaap Schröder *vn*
Christopher Hogwood *hpd*

Decca

This represents a milestone in the whole business of 'authentic instrument' recordings. It will not be to everyone's taste. To put it over-simply: the traditional way of playing Mozart, on a modern orchestra, has been to emphasize two things: the line of the music (usually the first violin part), and the texture as a totality. Here the music is presented more in terms of a series of lines, or as a texture that needs less to be blended or homogenized than to be evaluated afresh in its internal balance at any and every

moment. It makes the music more complex, more interesting, more challenging to listen to. The listener may find that the familiar broad sweep of some of these movements is lacking, but generally the compensations are more than sufficient. The first symphony here is K130, and you have only to hear the Academy violins sparkling through the vivacious *opera buffa* figuration of the first movement to have a clear idea of the character of this set. The scraps of imitative writing among the strings come over very sharply, clarified, in effect, by the pared-down violin tone, wholly devoid of the surplus fat that a richly creamy vibrato supplies. The Andantino is pleasant but not remarkable; here is music that does not lose,

in fact may gain, from the careful shaping hand of an orthodox conductor. To illustrate this, I would point to bars 27 and 32, where the second beat of the bar, the upper note of a rising figure preceding a rest, needs to be slightly pressed if the idea is to bear any expressive weight; here it is done as a throwaway, a touch of poetry is lost, and the phrase seems ordinary. This whole movement, in fact, seems a little cool, and at rather uniform a dynamic level. The minuet is wittily and sturdily done, and the finale has a good spirit, too. For sheer technical skill the Academy have nothing to fear by comparison with their equivalents abroad. The sound itself is excellent. The set can be warmly recommended. **Stanley Sadie** (12/79)

David Vickers This was the first volume to appear in the Academy of Ancient Music's series of Mozart's symphonies – a revelatory collaboration between period-instrument experimentation and cutting-edge musicological research. Mozart expert Neal Zaslaw was consulted closely at every step of the way regarding suitable sources and texts for editions, issues of performance practice, and the layout and size of the orchestra so that it reconstituted the Salzburg court orchestra as it might have been assembled at festive occasions in the early 1770s. His extensive sleeve notes read like an ardent manifesto, supported by a concordance of all Mozart's authentic symphonies, numerous illustrations from engravings, music examples and even a bibliography! A melting pot of scholarly enquiry and musical innovation like this would be unthinkable from a major label today.

Lindsay Kemp Yes, but it's the kind of thing that was then often part of the

package with L'Oiseau-Lyre 'Florilegium' releases – it all added to the excitement. Even so, the project was just as enthralling from the musical point of view, in the concept and in its importance. And, of course, in the fresh, revelatory sound of the classical orchestra. There was even a TV documentary about it, with the AAM set up in a studio and Hogwood directing and introducing. I remember watching it in my A-level music class – hard to imagine *that* happening now!

DV Forty years later, it might be too easy for a newcomer to underestimate how radical and fresh the use of period instruments at 430Hz was (and still seems to me) – many of them were originals, some loaned by collections in Oxford and Cambridge. Likewise, the co-direction shared between Jaap Schröder playing a restored Stradivari violin and Hogwood's unobtrusive harpsichord continuo gives the AAM's performances a distinctly collegial atmosphere.

LK The thing is, they changed the way we think about how these symphonies should sound. The balance between strings and winds in particular was completely different from that in the old 'modern' chamber orchestras, which had been virtually all strings, with the winds almost hiding in the background. Now, though, you could really hear why Classical-period composers put things together the way they did, and how exciting those new orchestral sounds must have seemed to them. The dual direction idea (pure applied musicology) didn't last, mind ...

DV Conductor-centric tradition has remained relatively unchallenged despite what the AAM achieved here. The English Concert's slightly less complete series just over a decade later for Archiv has more polished emotive phrasing that was very much sculpted by Trevor Pinnock from the harpsichord, whereas the AAM's interpretations sound to me like a collective effort by a team of



Christopher Hogwood conducting the Academy of Ancient Music

equal contributors. It's illuminating to learn how many talented pioneers of the British period-instrument scene were in the AAM for those sessions. Violinists Catherine Mackintosh, Simon Standage, Monica Huggett, Elizabeth Wilcock, Roy Goodman, Alison Bury, John Holloway and Judy Tarling all afterwards became eminent directors, soloists and concertmasters in their own right. Nicholas McGegan was one of the flautists. Among the violas is composer, teacher and Mozart editor Philip Wilby. In retrospect, it's an amazing all-star line-up!

LK It certainly is. And they sound pretty good too. Remembering some early period performances, I came back to this ready to wince, but actually there's nothing much to complain about. It was a great moment in time for them. And the whole thing was produced with such care by Peter Wadland.

DV Stanley Sadie's magisterial critique (quoted here in a significantly abridged version) of the original LP release is a poignant reminder of how insightful and informative his forensic reviews were. His descriptions of the music-making hold true. He had mild reservations about a few occasions when choppy detached strings in slow movements could have afforded to cultivate sustained emotional moods, and a few wobbles of tuning in some quick outer movements. But overall the fantastic musicianship from the AAM remains revitalising, especially with regards to crisply balanced textural details and a spirit of inquisitiveness.

LK Those slow movements are the weakest points, for sure. I always felt

Hogwood was one for following what the musicology suggested and only worrying about what it sounded like afterwards. He pretty much argued *against* interpretation at that time. It produced some wonderful things, but I'm not sure slow movements with all of their repeats and a timid sense of line were among them. The fizzing string tremolandos, firm wind textures, noisy drums and warm brass sounds elsewhere were great though.

DV Funnily enough, I particularly enjoy the AAM's delight taken in the sonorities of muted violins, unmuted violas and pizzicato cellos and basses, with lovely playing from the gentle flutes and fruity oboes. Many of those *Andantino grazioso* movements are balanced deftly, and there's beautifully nuanced shading-away at cadences. For example, the *Andante* of K133 has gorgeously intimate and hushed playing, every detail emerges with lucidity and charm, and there's lovely solo flute playing from Stephen Preston. It wholeheartedly embraces the expressive potential of the instruments' attributes and textures at the more delicate end of the timbral spectrum.

LK In terms of sound, these slow movements are lovely, and there are some great details of phrasing and articulation. I just wish for more sensitive shaping of the bigger picture in these movements – it's the same in the Haydn symphonies that Hogwood and the AAM recorded in the 1990s. Overall, though, I think the Mozart recordings are perfect showcases for these marvellous little symphonies, which in my opinion only came to life again with these recordings. After all these years, I still haven't heard any 'modern' orchestra get to their heart and release the light and joy in them like the AAM does.

DV Zaslaw's notes asserted that the AAM's approach to these symphonies 'relieves them of a romantic heaviness under which they have all too often been crushed. Thus unburdened, they sparkle with new lustre.' I reckon the AAM's classic recordings continue to speak with sparkle and lustre – the release wasn't only 'a milestone' (as Sadie immediately recognised) and a deserved *Gramophone* Award-winner in 1979, it remains a compelling account of relatively ignored Salzburg-era works. After all, this was Mozart's most prolific period composing symphonies, and so many persuasive moments here bring out his fecundity.

LK He was really revelling in his teenage talent and invention wasn't he? K134 is a gem, so light, playful and witty, with that Gluckian, Elysian slow movement and its weaving second violins, divided violas and glowingly soft flutes – that gains enormously from being played on period instruments. And I have a soft spot, too, for the overture-like symphonies such as K135 and K161/163, the kind of piece that's pure orchestral energy with no real themes to speak of, just a bustling, boisterous celebration of the scintillating new instrument that was the Classical orchestra. How lucky we were to be able to experience that afresh two centuries later!

DV The moments you mention are among my favourites too! There's also the festive sunniness in K133, in which the trumpets and kettledrums make a flamboyant impact. The short triple-time finale of K135 (a symphony version of the overture to *Lucio Silla*) shows how in this youthful phase the AAM could go hell for leather with an all out visceral energy. Then there's the boldly etched dynamic contrasts and *Sturm und Drang* tension in the spirited plunges into minor keys during the D major first movement of K162b, followed in the siciliano by Stanley King's soulful solo oboe. The AAM did consistently special work in Classical repertoire – although the same issue of *Gramophone* in 1979 also had a review of another brand-new album in their comparably groundbreaking series of Purcell's theatre music!

LK So it did! And the AAM's famous *Messiah* (which we also discussed in *Gramophone* – 4/15) arrived only a few months after this game-changing Mozart. Exciting times! **G**

Books



Charlotte Gardner is touched by a highly personal memoir:

'The most painful memories are so thoughtfully articulated that they evoke constructive pensiveness more than misery'



Peter Quantrill admires an eloquent guide to Mahler's Eighth Symphony:

'There are few modern writers in English to touch Johnson for practical musicology, with telling musical examples and no jargon'

Counterpoint

A Memoir of Bach and Mourning

By Philip Kennicott

WW Norton, HB, 256pp, £21

ISBN 978-0-393-63536-2



Longstanding readers of *Gramophone* may remember a moving column Philip Kennicott penned

from his childhood home for the February 2011 edition of the magazine, as his mother lay dying of cancer in the next room. Bach's Chaconne in D minor for solo violin, he told us, was suddenly the only music he could tolerate. 'Most seasons of the year I am happy to hear Bach's Chaconne, but I don't search it out,' he wrote. 'For a time now, and I don't know how long, its main service is to provide a cocoon, shutting out the stupidity of the world. There is, in fact, very little music that is as deep as life itself, perhaps only a handful of pieces ...'

With *Counterpoint* he now fills us in on the before and after of that column: the near-arbitrary tossing of the CD of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas into his bag as he packed for the trip to visit his mother – done largely just so that he had music of some sort to listen to as he waited for the end to come; the way the Chaconne then quickly became the single soundtrack to those days, taking over his emotional life as it appeared to him as 'music about life, but grounded on the fundamental fact of death'; the need to stow the CD away out of sight upon his return to New York, but the equal need to fill the new silence with music of the same 'inexhaustibility of emotion and meaning', drawing him to Glenn Gould's 1955 recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*; then the decision to tackle both his grief and a way to rediscover life, through tackling how to play the variations for himself and in the process perhaps better understand Bach himself.

What follows is a tender, wise, unflinchingly realistic and plain-spoken

memoir that charts Kennicott's pianistic, musicological, historical and emotional journey, with the *Goldbergs* acting as the supremely apt musical analogy for everything else that's going on – with Kennicott's relationship with his difficult, abusive mother as the fugal subject into which are deftly dovetailed Bach's music, the history of the piano and Kennicott's own history with it, combined with his reckoning with both middle age and his own mortality.

In musical terms, the structural analysis of this music is written with even more forensic, loving fascination than we're used to appreciating in Kennicott's writing. Likewise, his detailing of the various stages of wrestling with its technical and artistic demands is a joy. Then for the many lapsed musicians among us there's the pleasure of recognition. For instance, pitching up at a music shop for the first time in years and feeling a thrill of anticipation at turning the pristine pages of a newly purchased score which, as yet, is unsullied by the pain of being reminded of one's technical inadequacies. Or sustaining a lifelong friendship with their music teacher – in Kennicott's case, the pianist and composer Joseph Fennimore.

As it happens, it's possible that even elements of his lifelong struggle with his mother may strike a chord with some, much as the Kennicotts represent a tragic extreme. After all, the mid-late 20th century in particular produced its fair share of angry mothers – highly educated women who had been caught unawares by an era which on the one hand trumpeted female emancipation and a bright professional life for those who desired it, but which upon motherhood often snatched the career rug from underneath their unsuspecting feet. Kennicott's resolute acknowledgement of and generous desire to understand everything that went on is deeply moving.

Indeed, 'moving' is the word for *Counterpoint*. Furthermore, while one might assume that a book on Bach, mourning and mortality complete with abusive mother might make for

a thoroughly dispiriting read, the precise opposite is true. Certainly many of the vivid pictures he paints are heart-rending – the image of his teenage self lying on his back on the kitchen floor after a pivotal fracas with his mother is one now firmly lodged in my head. However, there's equally a palpable sense of quiet, newly found peace and acceptance radiating from its pages, meaning that even the most painful memories are so thoughtfully articulated that they tip the reader more into constructive pensiveness than misery. Kennicott's pictures aren't all painted in the minor key, either. Equally lodged in my head are the colourful descriptions of the respective homes, idiosyncrasies and teaching methods of his three piano teachers, while other stories had me laughing out loud – the culinary rewards which followed his discovery of aubergines' reproductive organs, for instance, or the great irony of his dog, Nathan, having a pathological hatred of Bach.

In short, this is a beautiful and unexpectedly uplifting read which will have you reaching for both Gould's *Goldbergs* and the Chaconne, and perhaps even looking at the world with renewed thoughtfulness. **Charlotte Gardner**

The Eighth

Mahler and the World in 1910

By Stephen Johnson

Faber & Faber, HB, 320pp, £18.99

ISBN 978-0-571-23494-3



Almost exactly a century ago, Samuel Langford, mentor and first editor to Neville Cardus, set the tone for much

English-speaking reception of Mahler's Eighth Symphony, having lately heard it under Mengelberg in Amsterdam. 'There are limits, in a busy world, to our patience with the simplicity of the naive in music ... We fear the [Eighth] rather completes



Mahler's vast and opulent Eighth Symphony receives a persuasive apologia

Mahler's philosophical view of life and art than adds anything definite to his musical achievement.' While filming *Death in Venice*, the story goes that Visconti gingered up Dirk Bogarde by telling him, 'Give me the Mahler who wrote the Ninth'. Not the Eighth.

Outside academic journals, at any rate, we have long been waiting for a counterblast to the received wisdom that on his summer holidays in 1906 – to caricature only slightly – Mahler took a break from his posthumously appointed role as vatic seer to our broken times, dashing off a hymn of painful sincerity and over-reach in praise of God, himself and, of course, that troublesome 'Eternal Feminine'. Klemperer, Walter, Haitink, Abbado: the list of Mahler conductors who would not touch the Eighth, or only with serious misgivings,

speaks for itself. Yet of all its unrecorded performances, real or imagined, the Eighth I treasure in my mind's ear was conducted in 1926 by Anton Webern, who adored the piece and in particular its more purple passages in Part 2. What must the master of the musical postcard have made of this 80-minute love-letter?

In the symphony's defence, Stephen Johnson gets to grips with dates and diaries, outlining a composition process rather more considered and less fuelled with holy fire than we thought we knew. He makes pertinent if speculative associations with *Death in Venice* and Plato's *Symposium*. More attention to the figure of Siegfried Lipiner, Mahler's friend and Goethe scholar, would have been welcome. So would a wider discussion of the symphony's synoptic musical

vocabulary, in emulation of Faust's catholicism ('half the history of the world lies behind it,' in the words of Goethe's amanuensis), rather than darting forays into the *Missa solemnis* and Schubert Lieder.

A chapter taking us through the Eighth verse by verse, sometimes line by line, finds Johnson in his element: there are very few modern writers in English to touch him for practical musicology, linking tonalities to text and meaning with the help of a few telling music examples but no jargon. His chosen, Mahlerian leitmotif, 'Sometimes the opposite is also true', strikes its target in the following chapter, 'Questions of Identity', in consideration of religious, cultural and political tensions underscoring a work which its composer intended as 'a gift to the German nation'.

My credulity is strained by the proposition that there is an 'opposite', tragic quality to the Eighth in the sublimated eroticism of Part 2 and even in its lofty flight from quintessentially Mahlerian obsessions with dancing and death. Still, in the midst of life we are in death: Mahler was surely on the side of St Paul. There was 'a rift in his being', Alma decided, and she is the hinge on which the book turns from the brilliant E flat major of the Eighth into the otherworldly F sharp major of the Tenth. Both works 'belong' to her as much as to her husband – dedicatee of one, subject of the other – and it is necessarily part of Johnson's pursuit of wholeness that he finds as much resolution as resignation in the later symphony's long extinction. I wonder if he isn't fighting a battle already won with popular acceptance of the Tenth, which is now more commonly heard than the Eighth on aesthetic as well as practical grounds.

Mahler said that his time would come, which it did with a vengeance, casting into shadow the greatest success of his career as a composer. Perhaps the Eighth's time has come again, in the guise not only of this persuasive apologia, but also performances that venture beyond vocal opulence and sheer impact. More than that of any other major composer, Mahler's output reads like a career-long *roman-à-clef*, a dance to the music of time, and Gražinytė-Tyla and Jurowski are among the conductors who have brought the Eighth home in concert with a new spirit of affirmation in recent years, more joyful, more observant of the score and less self-consciously profound than most of their predecessors. On record, there remains much left unsaid about the symphony, but anyone with Johnson's eloquent guide to hand should become better equipped to read between the lines.

Peter Quantrill

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Bernstein's Mass

Edward Seckerson weighs up the small but perfectly formed recorded competition in the work he considers Bernstein's finest

It was back in 1989 during my one and only audience with Leonard Bernstein that I experienced what I believe would now be referred to as 'a moment'. We were discussing 'the song about the writing of a song' (Lenny's words) from the 'Sanctus' of *Mass* – a theatre piece for singers, players and dancers. Consider that passage. The Celebrant plucks idly at his guitar, a single note: 'Mi. Mi alone is only mi ... but mi with sol ... me with soul' ... Suddenly there's a second note and that means a melody and with it 'a song' is beginning, 'is beginning to grow, take wing, and rise up singing from me and my soul'. And as Bernstein spoke the words he instinctively began to sing them in that unmistakably gravelly voice of his – and in that moment I saw, like a startling action replay, the way in which that melody had first evolved. *In the singing of it.*

So fazed was I by this spontaneous private performance that I rather boldly announced to the great man (as only a fledgling journalist could) that I believed that *Mass* would come to be seen as his most important piece. There, I had said it. And now, 30 years on, I can say it again and more than ever believe it to be true. No other work of Bernstein's encapsulates *exactly* who he was as a man and a musician; no other work exercises his genius, his intellect, his theatricality, his musical virtuosity quite like *Mass*.

It was written in response to a suggestion by Jackie Kennedy that Bernstein write the inaugural centrepiece for the opening of the John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC in 1971. The work, it was suggested, should take account of the different disciplines that would be showcased in the venue. Ambition and Celebration were the watchwords. And so *Mass* was born in the larger-than-life image of Bernstein himself. At its core – and this was beyond audacious at the time – was the sacred text of the Roman Catholic

Mass. But it was a text *under scrutiny*. Under duress. In collaboration with the then only 23-year-old Stephen Schwartz (composer of Broadway shows from *Godspell* to *Wicked*), Bernstein's theatrical objective was to challenge those texts from the perspective of the world as it then was. Or rather the America as it then was: a nation caught up in an unpopular war; a nation ravaged by political and racial conflict – the war at home – a nation in protest.

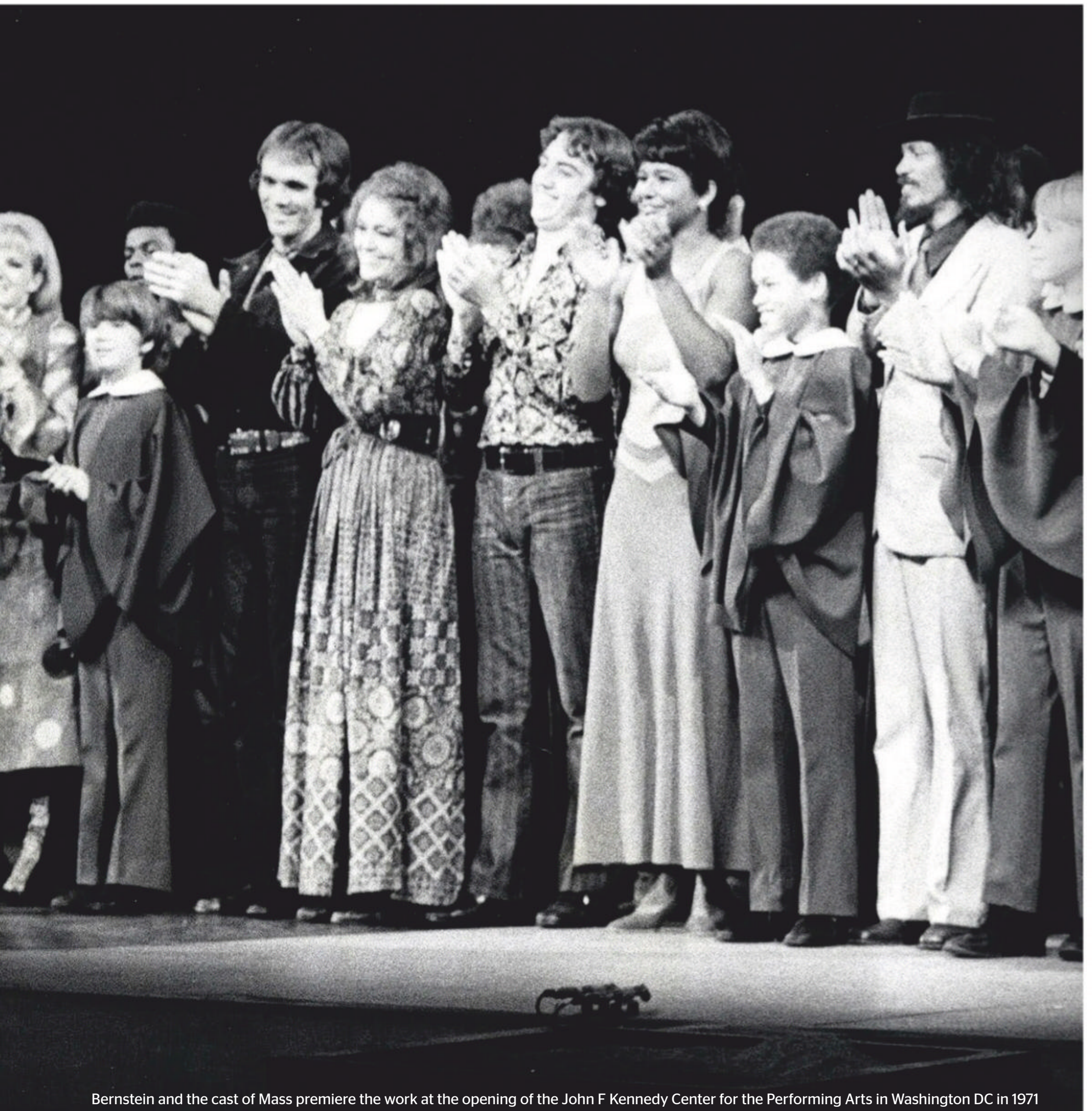
Mass is in so many ways the ultimate protest piece. But equally it's a piece about Bernstein's own crisis of faith. It's about intellectual rigour versus religious dogma. It's about enlightenment versus blind acceptance. The Celebrant of Bernstein's *Mass* is rejected by his own kind for peddling unconditional devotion. His spectacular breakdown at the climax of the piece comes at precisely the moment when he can no longer hide behind the paraphernalia of the church. He smashes the sacraments, discards the vestments. He's one of us again. A regular guy with a guitar. Time to regroup, time to heal.

All humankind inhabits *Mass* – and all manner of music. A bewildering array of styles in scintillating juxtaposition. Music, says *Mass*, is Bernstein's one true religion. Its diversity and fervour can move mountains; it can transcend political, social, religious barriers, heal divisions. Or to quote the man himself: 'Music universally shared is the one sure way to the divine.' There you have it. A *religious* experience – but note the small 'r'. So *pace* the naysayers. The mad, jubilant eclecticism of *Mass* – where atonal meets folksy meets soul meets gospel meets rock meets Broadway – is as much a celebration of Bernstein's craft as it is his creed.

As some indication of the work's enduring power and growing popularity, there are now *six* recordings of it. That fact alone would have thrilled Bernstein. And it would certainly have bemused him to see



his most rebellious child featured as part of the Vatican 2000 celebrations in Rome. I was there. No dancing, no props, mind: those were the conditions laid down for the presentation. So when the Celebrant angrily flung down the sacraments at the work's mind-bending climax, the scarlet seam of cardinals seated impassively (and somewhat incongruously) in the front row of the audience/congregation cannot



Bernstein and the cast of *Mass* premiere the work at the opening of the John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC in 1971

possibly have known what was going on. Just as well, perhaps ...

THE MAN HIMSELF

Leonard Bernstein must have been there in spirit cheering on his 'turbulent priest'. His inaugural recording based on the 1971 world premiere has its own special aura and excitement. It's engineered to within an inch of its

life for optimum immediacy. It isn't state-of-the-art but it's certainly 'in your face'. And more than anything, it's the gospel according to Lenny – he alone knows how every bar, every style, every allusion should go. He relishes the gamesmanship and is as 'knowing' playing with 12 tones as he is being self-indulgently cheesy. It feels spontaneous and it feels authentic.

At the heart of *Mass* – more so than the *Mass* itself – are the responses, the Tropes. These are the soul of the piece, songful reflections (among the finest Bernstein ever penned) from a group of sharply defined individuals dubbed the 'Street Singers'. Just so. They are all of us. And they, like the Celebrant himself, demand a special breed of musical theatre performers with the composer's nose for



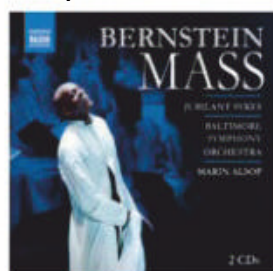
Jubilant Sykes's Celebrant (top) under Alsop (above), whose Mass is energetic and committed

GOOD ALL-ROUNDER

Sykes; Baltimore SO / Alsop

Naxos (B) (2) 8 559622/3

Marin Alsop inherited the mantle of this piece from its creator and she



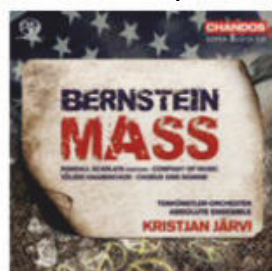
spreads his word with energy and commitment. I want more abandon – but Jubilant Sykes is fierce as the Celebrant.

THE RUNNER-UP

Scarlata; Tonkünstler Orch / K Järvi

Chandos (M) (2) CHSA5070

Kristjan Järvi comes closest to Bernstein in terms of dynamism and immediacy.



Not everything and everybody hits the mark but he's in his element with the genre-hopping and is definitely the funkiest of the contenders.

style. Bernstein's motley crew are just about as good as they get – because they've learnt the piece with him, through him.

Likewise the wonderful Alan Titus, whose Celebrant marries a honeyed baritone with gorgeous head-voice enticements to a sexy demeanour and an actor's feeling for text. Vocally the piece sounds bespoke for him and his meltdown (Bernstein's oblique homage to *Peter Grimes*?) is as full-on and as moving as any I have ever experienced.

The most stupendous passage in the entire piece precipitates this final 'scene' and is built from a funkily insistent 10-bar refrain of 'Dona nobis pacem' on which Bernstein does a Shostakovich *Leningrad*, building and building it, layer upon layer, decibel upon decibel, as the plea for peace turns into a demand. But there is no peace. End of.

You'd expect Bernstein to go for broke in this passage, and he absolutely does. It's a wailing wall of a climax, electric guitars and the entire instrumental ensemble instructed to top 'anything from the entire musical literature'.

BERNSTEIN'S FOLLOWERS

But we need to come down to earth – less with a bang, more with a whimper. **Kent Nagano's** 2003 recording on Harmonia Mundi with the late Jerry Hadley as the Celebrant can be swiftly set aside. You would not think it possible to strip a piece this audacious of its personality – but that's precisely what Nagano does. At best it feels *dutiful*, at worst prosaic. No joy, no abandon. It never feels emotionally connected – and poor Jerry Hadley, uncharacteristically mannered and clearly not what he once was vocally, overworks the parody of that final scene in such a way as to distance us from it completely. Philip Clark called it when he wrote in these pages: 'When Kent Nagano brought down the tablets of stone in 2003, frankly, he dropped some.' Boom, boom.

Of the most recent recordings, one from the American conductor **Dennis Russell Davies** wrestles with Viennese forces and a group of Street Singers whose tendency is to impersonate and not to inhabit the styles. Imitating the vernacular is a very real and present danger in this piece. Those Tropes need

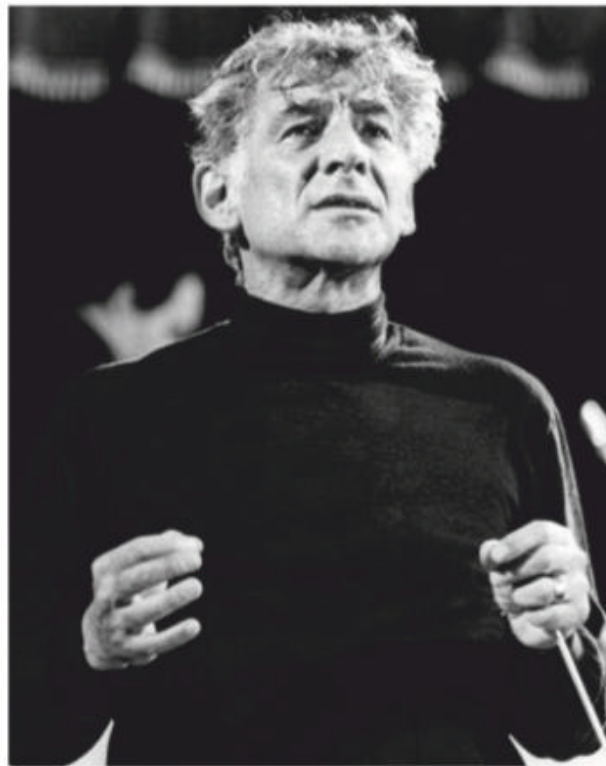
to feel spontaneous and, well, 'streety'. And that's a big ask given their technical challenges. The rebellious rocker who sings 'I believe in God' is more hectoring here than confrontational. There's a difference. Besides, there's also an uncomfortable sense of solo voices being miked in a reverberant space (Konzerthaus, Vienna). Are we simply in the wrong venue for the piece?

Or maybe the whole performance simply needs to loosen up. Vojtěch Dyk is the Celebrant and very much a 'presence'. But he starts as he means to go on, naughty boy, by adding far too many of his own vocal riffs to a number which is not called 'Simple Song' for nothing. His meltdown is possessed of a maniacal, almost cartoonish relish – but there are moments of great beauty, too, and they need to be more diligently sung.

The conductor I would have expected to have wholeheartedly embraced – and nailed – this piece is **Yannick Nézet-Séguin**. His live Philadelphia recording takes advantage of technical advances (and new tapes for the quadraphonic 'Kyrie eleisons' of the opening) and the often garish colours of the piece shine brightly – but does its showbizzy razzmatazz really hit home? Yes and no. A couple of snare-drum rim-shots signal the entry of the marching bands in the First Introit but their politeness is in no way suggestive of the allusion that always works for me: that of 'Seventy-six trombones' from Broadway's *The Music Man*.

Nézet-Séguin gets the genre-hopping, of course, but you could say he has cast his Celebrant – the excellent Kevin Vortmann – and Street Singers more for their 'legit' vocal skills than their streetwise personalities. They are singers first, actors second. I think they need to be fresh off the Broadway or West End stage. That said, Sarah Uriarte Berry's 'Thank you' (perhaps the most ravishing and most poignant of the Tropes) is beautiful. As is Vortmann's 'I go on', as cathartic a confessional of a song as Bernstein – indeed anyone – ever set down.

The Celebrant can be such a sticking point in this piece and there are issues in that regard with the two recordings that



Bernstein's recording buzzes with excitement

I would put up alongside Bernstein's own: Marin Alsop's and Kristjan Järvi's. I doubt anyone knows this piece as well or has conducted it more often than **Marin Alsop**. And arguably she has the most dynamic and authentic-sounding Street People outside of Bernstein. There's not a better Rock Singer for 'I believe in God' and Stephen Schwartz's favourite number in the piece, 'World without end', has an urgency that we now understand all too well.

Alsop also has Jubilant Sykes, whose Celebrant has charisma and soul in spades and whose way with this gospel sounds like it's been refracted through a James Brown sensibility. But I do have a 'but' about Sykes. The way the Celebrant is written vocally sits awkwardly across Sykes's break – and not only does the use of 'head voice' not come naturally to him, it actually doesn't come at all. He sings pretty much everything in full voice and that in itself crucially inhibits the more confidential tone required in those many moments where haunting and inward are equated with high and soft.

I also have a 'but' about Alsop. She's a super-committed keeper of the flame where Bernstein is concerned and the slickness and efficiency with which she dispatches *Mass* (and I've seen her do it live twice now) is impressive. But she can be careful


where she needs to be kick-ass, and not everything in her reading is as punchy and/or audacious as I for one would like it to be.

Kristjan Järvi on Chandos punches consistently above his weight. Like Russell Davies, he deploys Viennese forces – the Tonkünstler Orchestra and Chorus and Wiener Singakademie – that hit the mark as much as they are wide of it. But I do love the edgy, raucous tone and *attitude* of Järvi's upbeat approach. Everything is flung into the sharpest relief and he lays into the rhythm of the piece, making each volte-face in style and instrumental colour leap off the page. Punches are not pulled and things like that delirious 'dance before the ark' in the Offertory come closer than any other recording to matching Bernstein's own almost indecent fervour.

Randall Scarlata is Järvi's Celebrant and his voice can do pretty much anything he wants it to do. But I do wonder about a few of his stylistic choices (and I am curious about the *a cappella* setting of 'The Lord's Prayer' here acquiring a piano) and maybe, just maybe, the singer in him is a stronger presence than the actor.

THE FINAL VERDICT

I suppose that's another way of saying that the sensational Alan Titus and Bernstein's entire 'worshipful company' of street people, singers and dancers – each and every one of them so self-evidently under the composer's spell – continue to be a tough act to follow, leave alone surpass. I would choose Järvi as my first runner-up ahead of Alsop if only because that hint of rebelliousness in his conducting strikes me as closer to the spirit of challenge and protest that this amazing work enshrines.

As in everything Bernstein ever touched, *Mass* ends hopefully: 'The Mass is ended. Go in peace.' A burgeoning D major canon conveys the words 'Lauda, laude' into the happily hereafter and Bernstein, the optimist or hopeful pessimist, casts his healing light over one last statement of his chorale 'Almighty Father', a quietly overwhelming nod to Bach, one composer to another. 

TOP CHOICE

Titus; orch / Bernstein

Sony Classical (S) (7) 88697 88086-2

The composer's hand-picked ensemble were very much complicit in the genesis



of *Mass* – and it shows. We are up close and personal in the moment of inception and the buzz of first-time excitement is tangible.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1971 Alan Titus; orch / Leonard Bernstein	Sony Classical (S) (7) 88697 88086-2; (S) (10) 88697 27988-2; (S) (25 CDs) 88985 34531-2 (4/72)*
2003 Jerry Hadley; Deutsches SO Berlin / Kent Nagano	Harmonia Mundi (F) (2) HMC90 1840/41 (12/04)
2008 Randall Scarlata; Lower Austria Tonkünstler Orch / Kristjan Järvi	Chandos (M) (2) CHSA5070 (5/09)
2008 Jubilant Sykes; Baltimore SO / Marin Alsop	Naxos (B) (2) 8 559622/3 (9/09)
2015 Kevin Vortmann; Philadelphia Orch / Yannick Nézet-Séguin	DG (M) (2) 483 5009GH2 (5/18)
2018 Vojtěch Dyk; ORF Vienna RSO / Dennis Russell Davies	Capriccio (F) (2) C5370 (6/20)

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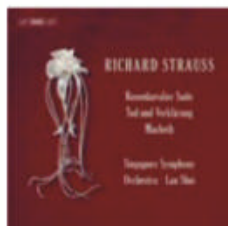
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THIS MONTH A high-value network audio amplifier from a famous Japanese name, fine small speakers from a French one, and how is the hi-fi industry changing?

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

AUGUST TEST DISCS



A vibrant Strauss programme from the Singapore SO under Lan Shui on BIS, available in a range of formats including sparkling high resolution.



The always reliable combination of Reference Recordings and the Pittsburgh SO with Manfred Honeck excels itself in this latest release.

The rise of the audiophile network switch

An old name from the past revived for a new product, a flat-panel speaker and a high-end CD player

Recent months have seen the rise of a new element for network audio systems: the audiophile switch.

Designed to replace the kind of Ethernet switches found in most networks, these audiophile models feature a number of strategies designed to improve the accuracy of the data being delivered, reduce noise and so on.

Now comes a product from cable manufacturer The Chord Company, bearing a brand name new to the hi-fi industry. The £449 8switch **1** is being sold as the first audio product from English Electric, a brand perhaps best known in the past for the manufacture of everything from railway locomotives to aeroplanes. The Chord Company acquired the name to use on a forthcoming range of electronic products to complement its core cable business, and the 8switch combines in-house engineering with overseas manufacturing, not to mention coming with a 0.75m Chord C-Stream Ethernet cable to connect it **2**. As the name suggests, it's an eight-port switch, with 'audio-grade 100/1000 Base-T gigabit Ethernet ports', and is designed to be used between the internet router, a NAS storage device or computer and a network player. It has been designed with a high-quality Temperature Compensation Crystal Oscillator 'to generate higher-accuracy network signals, which in turn help provide more stable music-data transmission', while power comes from a medical-grade offboard high-speed switch-mode power supply, with noise insulation in both power and clock-generation circuits and a further electromagnetic noise insulator in the digital circuitry.



Back in more conventional hi-fi territory, there's a new entry-level flat-panel speaker from US manufacturer Magneplanar. The Magneplanar LRS-1 **3** is designed to offer the company's celebrated sound while keeping the size – and the price – down. Standing just over 1.2m tall but less than 40cm wide and only 2.5cm thick, as befits its 'Little Ribbon Speaker' title, and selling for £995, the LRS-1 is a full-range quasi-ribbon speaker capable of delivering a frequency range of 50Hz-20kHz and with an amplifier-friendly 86dB/W/m sensitivity. While the company's earlier 'entry-level' speakers were designed down for use with modest amplification, the LRS-1 will work with less expensive systems but is also built to 'grow' with higher-end electronics. Available in natural or black solid oak, dark cherry trim with off-white, grey or black fabric, the price includes delivery from the UK distributor, Decent Audio.

At the other end of the hi-fi chain is the new moving magnet cartridge from British record player and cable manufacturer Vertere. The Magneto **4** is now being fitted as standard on the company's entry-level DG-1 Dynamic Groove record player (which starts from £2750) and is available to buy at £220. It's closely related to the Audio Technica VM520EB and can accept styli for the VM5x, allowing users to

upgrade to an improved stylus profile at a later date, and has been developed using Vertere's close association with the business of cutting records. That means a dual-magnet design to replicate the set-up of the cutting head, with the V-form magnet assembly mimicking the shape of the record groove, and a permalloy centre shield to enhance frequency response and reduce crosstalk. The standard stylus is an elliptical design for fine tracking and low noise.

Back to digital audio, and QED has launched a new Reference High Resolution USB cable **5** with a slimmer, more flexible profile and enhanced performance. Available in lengths from 0.6m to 3m and starting from £74.95, it's said to 'exceed all the requirements for high-resolution audio, supporting files beyond 24-bit/192kHz, as well as DSD and MQA audio file formats'. It uses an Impedance Controlled Data Line to reduce jitter, full isolation between the data and power connections and a floating ferrite layer to reduce noise. It's supplied in a USB A-to-USB B configuration.

Finally, not just a new CD player but a new high-end model. The £3500 Luxman D-03X **6** uses a dedicated CD transport and conversion circuitry using dual TI PCM175 chips, and has digital inputs to allow it to function as a DAC for external digital sources. Coaxial and optical inputs can handle content at up to 192kHz/24-bit, while the USB Type B input for computer connection extends this to encompass DSD and MQA-encoded files. The converters are run in dual differential mode, feeding fully balanced circuitry, and the player has both RCA and balanced XLR outputs. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Marantz PM7000N

The latest company to launch an integrated amplifier with built-in network audio capability, Marantz has used all its expertise to present a very comprehensive offering

As has been noted in these pages in the past, network-capable audio products come in all shapes and sizes these days, from wireless speakers and streaming mini-systems through to CD players, DACs and receivers. However, until recently integrated stereo amplifiers have tended to remain rather more purist devices. A few have offered modular network add-ons but mainly it's been a case of users needing to combine them with a dedicated network audio player.

Of late, that seems to be changing, with the arrival of models such as the Cyrus ONE Cast featured in these pages in April and, in the high-end market, the likes of Hegel's H390 and H590 models. Now sees the arrival of a streaming amplifier in one of the best-known ranges in the hi-fi arena – that of Marantz – with the launch of the £999 PM7000N, drawing on both its expertise in amplifiers, going back almost 70 years, and its more recent history in network audio.

Marantz was one of the first mainstream audio companies to embrace streaming with the arrival of its NA7004 a decade ago, closely followed by the high-end NA-11S1, which took the fight to the likes of the Naim NDX and NDS by offering wider-ranging file format handling. From the start Marantz didn't just offer the choice between compressed files, such as MP3s, and uncompressed FLAC/WAV from CD-quality up to 192kHz/24-bit high-resolution. The NA11S1 could handle both DSD64 and DSD128 via an asynchronous USB link from a computer – and I'm not



MARANTZ PM7000N

Type Network amplifier

Price £999

Output 60Wpc into 8 ohms, 80W into 4 ohms

Analogue inputs moving magnet phono, three line

Digital inputs Coaxial, two optical, USB Type A, network, Bluetooth

File formats Up to 192kHz/24-bit, plus DSD64/128 from USB or network

Analogue outputs Line, one pair of speakers, subwoofer, headphones

Networking Ethernet/Wi-Fi

Tone controls Yes, with bypass

Finishes Black, silver gold

Accessories supplied Remote handset, Wi-Fi/Bluetooth antennae

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44x12.5x37.9cm
marantz.com

sure there were too many DSD128 files about in 2013, when it arrived in the shops!

Since then the company has released a range of formats of streaming hardware, from its compact Melody series of systems through to network-capable AV receivers, more recently incorporating stablemate Denon's HEOS multiroom audio technology. At the end of 2017 it rolled out its ND8006, designed as 'the complete digital music source player', with CD playback, network streaming, computer DAC capability and HEOS multiroom, while last year the NR1200, a slimline stereo network receiver, joined the range. That last model took its format

from the company's ongoing line-up of slim AV receivers, designed to slot into TV stands and other tight spaces, but the NR1200 is a pure stereo model – albeit one able to take audio from a TV over HDMI.

The PM7000N we have here comes at the whole network audio thing from a different direction, being based on the company's highly successful stereo amps, the latest generation of which is the excellent PM-006 range. At the affordable end of the market, the PM6006 remains a best-seller at around the £350 mark, while the statement model in the line-up is the PM8006 at about £1000. The PM7000N draws on elements from the top-end model

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The PM7000N performs well with the compact Focal Chora 806 speakers and has more than enough power to drive these larger Chora 812 floorstanders.



PM7000N HEOS

To hear the PM7000N HEOS capability in action, pair it with HEOS wireless speakers such as the Home 250, an all-in-one stereo solution.



while adding network capability, and does so while remaining very conventional in its looks, I suspect to appeal to those wanting a 'normal' stereo amp but with a degree of future-proofing into the bargain.

The basics of the PM7000N are that it's an amplifier with both analogue and digital inputs, on to which has been grafted a complete network/streaming/multiroom platform. Indeed, those wanting to revert to purist analogue operation can shut down the digital section – either completely or in stages – to simplify the signal path. The digital platform is already fully shielded in its own case, to minimise interference with the rest of the amp, but switching it off completely returns the Marantz to an exclusively analogue design.

Three line inputs are provided, and record players are catered for with the in-house Marantz Musical Phono, using a field-effect transistor in its input stage to give a high impedance, eliminate capacitors in the simplified signal path and enhance purity. The main amplifier design, delivering 60W per channel, uses the company's Current Feedback topology and Marantz Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Modules (built from miniature components and used in place of the chip solutions found in rival designs) to deliver extended dynamics and low noise. The amplifier also uses a toroidal transformer and instantaneous-current power supply, while the newly designed pre-amp section has an electronic volume control for enhanced channel separation and signal-to-noise performance. Outputs are provided for a single set of speakers, a subwoofer (with adjustable crossover) and headphones.

The digital section has one coaxial and two optical inputs, along with a network connection on both Ethernet and Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and a USB Type A port able to accept memory devices from which music can be played. Depending on input, the PM7000N can play files up to 192kHz/24-bit and DSD128.

PERFORMANCE

The HEOS implementation is at the heart of the amp's streaming capability and is controlled using the HEOS app, available for Android and iOS tablets and smartphones. As well as streaming from

local storage, for example on a computer running UPnP software or a dedicated Network Attached Storage (NAS) unit, it also allows access to internet radio and online services such as Amazon Music HD, Spotify and Tidal.

What's more, HEOS allows music to be shared with other suitable devices on the home network, including the HEOS range of wireless speakers and many Marantz and Denon products, and you can even ask the system to play music in particular 'zones' of the network using Amazon Alexa voice commands. But whether you shout at it or use the app, the HEOS system is one of the simplest and slickest streaming solutions available, and it makes this aspect of the PM7000N a pleasure to use.

The Marantz PM7000N we have here comes at the whole network audio thing from a different direction

What's more, this is a fine analogue amplifier, too, with the trickle-down from the PM8006 much in evidence in its powerful yet refined handling of a wide range of music. As is usual with the company's products, it does all the hi-fi things right, in that the sound is packed with detail, especially when it comes to the presence and ambience of recordings, but the main focus is always on the performance and conveying the musical experience to the listener. That was at the heart of the way the company's late Brand Ambassador, Ken Ishiwata, viewed hi-fi, and it's very much in evidence here, not least in the confidence with which the PM7000N controls and drives speakers, whether with solo instrumental recitals such as the recent Linn releases featuring young musicians from the Royal Academy, or the great orchestral warhorses.

I've shared before my enthusiasm for the Kansas City Symphony/Michael Stern recording of Holst's *The Planets* (Reference Recordings, 1/20^{US}). Played by the Marantz in 'hi-res' into a pair of large floorstanding speakers it has thrilling texture, finesse, power and dynamics, demonstrating that this is a very flexible yet uncompromised amplifier. **G**

Or you could try ...

The network amplifier trend is beginning to spread and while building networking into an integrated amplifier increases the price, it also keeps things relatively compact without compromising the analogue performance of the amp.

Cyrus ONE Cast

For a budget solution, you could try the PM7000N's slimline stablemate, the NR1200 receiver, but if you want to keep things really compact the Cyrus ONE Cast, with its shoebox styling, might appeal. Using Google Cast technology, it's simple to stream to this amplifier from any compatible app on a smartphone or tablet, and it has a decent phono stage built in for a turntable alongside an analogue line input, HDMI for TV sound and a USB Type B to which a computer can be connected. For more details, see cyrusaudio.com.



Arcam SA30

The Arcam SA30 is the latest addition to the company's HDA amplifier range and combines high-quality analogue amplification using the Class G technology used in previous high-end Arcam amps with network streaming under the control of the Arcam Music Life app. It also has three line inputs and a high-quality moving coil/moving magnet phono stage for turntables, all packaged in the sleek and uncomplicated design that's the hallmark of the current Arcam range. Find out more at arcam.co.uk.



Hegel H390

Hegel's H390 amplifier is undoubtedly a high-end heavyweight, thanks not least to its 250Wpc, but even more striking is that it offers much of the performance of the company's H590, which delivers 301Wpc (!) at a considerably lower price. And don't be fooled by the simple looks: the H390 features UPnP network streaming, a USB Type B port for computer connection and more, and supports a wide range of 'hi-res' file formats. Discover more at hegel.com.



● REVIEW FOCAL CHORA 806

Highly persuasive speakers

The smallest model in the French company's latest entry-level range delivers a big sound

Never let it be said that Focal is afraid to innovate. Its high-end Utopia III Evo speakers have a design as novel as it is imposing – especially in the huge Grande Utopia EM, all two metres plus and 265kg apiece of it, complete with a 40cm electromagnetic woofer with offboard power supply, Power Flower mid-range drivers and a Focus Time crank handle to the rear of the cabinet to adjust the five cabinet sections relative to each other.

Visit Focal HQ in Saint-Étienne, France, and you swiftly become aware that this is a company dedicated to doing things its own way, from the protective room in which a space-suited technician supervises the manufacture of the beryllium dome used in the treble drivers of many of its designs to the facility where the company's 'W' drivers are made. The name, incidentally, comes from the construction, using two layers of glass fibre sandwiching a foam core: two Vs – for 'verre' – equal a 'W', at least in French!

Similar care goes into the construction – by hand – of the cabinets for the company's high-end and professional speakers at Focal Ébénisterie Bourgogne in Bourbon-Lancy, Burgundy. And while the manufacture of some more affordable models is outsourced to partner companies – as is inevitable in the modern price-conscious audio market – the design and engineering is still very much centred on the Saint-Étienne facility, where the company has an especially impressive listening facility.

That combination of innovation and the 'Made in France' stamp at the heart of the company's offering isn't reserved for the high-end models, however. It extends all the way down from the Utopia range through the Sopra, Kanta and Aria series, and also applies to the recently launched Chora offering, which runs to seven models, and the longer-established Chorus 700 line.

Focal is known for exploring alternative materials for its speaker drive units – the Aria models introduced the use of flax fibres at the core of mid-range and bass cones – and the Chora line-up is no exception. Here the new material is 'Slatefibre', a recycled carbon fibre 'filler' used again in the mid/bass drivers. Yes, speaker manufacturers use carbon fibre and

other materials such as Kevlar, woven into matting, in their driver diaphragms, but here the fibres aren't woven but all aligned in the same direction, providing damping and stiffness to thermoplastic polymer cones while maintaining lightness as well as giving the drivers their characteristic grey colour. And in typical Focal style, the company has installed a specific semi-automated tool to manufacture the drivers in-house in Saint-Étienne.

Selling for £599 a pair, the Chora 806 we have here is the smallest model in the range and the only standmount design. 'Small' is somewhat relative here, however, the 806 standing some 43cm tall and available with an optional 55cm stand (at £199/pr), which gives the speaker a slight tilt, 'for Time Alignment'. Above the 806 sit two floorstanding models, the £1099/pr 816 and £1299/pr 826, while for the surround-sound buyer there's a version of the 826 with additional upwards-firing drivers for Dolby Atmos, plus centre and surround speakers. The range is available in light or dark wood finishes, or gloss black.

In the 806, the 16.5cm mid/bass driver used in all the Chora models is joined by the same 25mm TNF aluminium/magnesium tweeter found across the range, the bass being reflex-loaded with a front-venting port, with a circular magnetic grille covering the mid/bass unit if required.

PERFORMANCE

With that front-venting port, the Chora 806 isn't as fussy as some speakers when it comes to keeping it clear of walls, although if one wanted to get picky about this, the company provides its familiar formula to help: 'If A is the distance from the centre of the woofer to the nearest floor or wall, B is the distance to the next closest floor or wall and C is the greatest distance ($A < B < C$), the equation $B^2 = AC$ defines the ideal loudspeaker position.'

Does that help? Perhaps, but the rough rule is that the speaker is at about the right height when used on the Focal stands – or the 60cm ones I used – and should be about 0.5m from the rear wall and a bit further from the side walls. Add in that the distance between the speakers should be equal to or less than the distance to the listener, and give them a little toe-in to firm up the stereo image, and you won't go far wrong.



FOCAL CHORA 806

Type Two-way standmount/bookshelf speaker

Price £599/pr

Drivers 25mm aluminium/magnesium dome tweeter, 16.5cm 'Slatefibre' cone mid/bass

Crossover 3kHz

Sensitivity 89dB/W/m

Impedance 8 ohms nominal, 4.6 ohm minimum

Frequency response (+/-3dB) 58Hz-28kHz

Suggested amplifier power 25-120W

Accessories supplied Feet for shelf use, magnetic grilles for mid/bass drivers; stands £199/pr option

Dimensions (HxWxD) 43.1x21x27cm

focal.com

It's worth noting, however, that these are designed as speakers for modest-sized rooms, Focal quoting spaces up to 20m², which should cover most domestic environments. If you have a larger space, one of the floorstanders in the range may be more suitable.

I came to these speakers with a note of caution sounding – a colleague had tried them and found them rather light in the bass and somewhat treble-happy – but having spent some time with the speakers, I have to say I had few such qualms. Yes, there isn't the bass extension you might get from much larger designs, and the treble – at least after some use – is more explicit and open than aggressive, giving a good sense of the ambience in recordings but staying sweet with even the most enthusiastic soprano!

What is beyond a doubt is that the Slatefibre mid/bass driver combines with that metal tweeter to give a midband that's both expressive and entirely unforced, bringing out excellent instrumental and vocal timbres and textures, as well as allowing these relatively small speakers to cast broad, deep sound-stage images when required. Used with the Marantz PM7000N also reviewed this month (see page 102), the Chora 806 delivered a highly persuasive sound, playing to the strengths of the amplifier, suggesting that these speakers would be suitable for a wide range of amps of similar power. **G**

● ESSAY

More to it than 'bits is bits' and '0s and 1s'

The more you delve into network audio, the more you become aware that all kinds of things can affect the sound. It can be a slippery slope, says Andrew Everard

There's one sure-fire way to get yourself flamed on internet forums, and you don't even need to go near race, religion or politics. All you need to do is make yourself comfortable in one of the many online hi-fi discussion arenas, then proffer the view that changing almost any element in a digital audio system can affect the sound.

It goes further than the almost immediate assertions that 'bits is bits' and 'it's all just 0s and 1s', intended to reinforce the viewpoint that a digital datastream is either there in all its pristine magnificence or simply fails, with no 'grey area' in between. The next stage in this argument is that there's no point in spending more than about £30 on a digital-to-analogue converter – they start from less than £10 from the usual online merchants – because 'all properly designed DACs should sound the same'. Mind you, you can find the same insistence about CD players, amplifiers – in fact, almost anything apart from loudspeakers.

Many of these entrenched opinions come from a particular viewpoint, perhaps best summarised as 'I don't need to listen for differences, because I know they can't exist', to which I can only respond that, in more than four decades of listening to hi-fi – both for pleasure and for a living – it has become very apparent to me that these differences do exist. Purely out of interest I have bought DACs costing under £10, including free next-day delivery – how do they do it? – and I have also spent time with digital converters carrying price tags well into five figures, and there are definitely differences.

Some are major, some are minor, and there's not always a direct correlation between price and sound quality. Some very affordable designs, such as the iFi Audio Zen DAC (reviewed in April), have shocked me with the level of performance they could muster, while several very expensive models with seemingly impressive back stories have left me distinctly unimpressed. But differences there certainly are.

But then, that's one of the problems with moving up the quality ladder when building and developing a hi-fi system: the more revealing a set-up becomes, the more obvious are the effects of even those



Network switches: do they make a difference?

elements one might previously have taken for granted. Which is exactly where I find myself now when it comes to networked audio. I'm hearing differences the online rationalists will tell me not only shouldn't exist, but simply can't.

*I'm hearing differences
the online rationalists will
tell me not only shouldn't
exist, but simply can't*

All this has come to a head with the emergence on the hi-fi scene of what are being described as 'audiophile' network switches – those little boxes with a bank of RJ45 Ethernet sockets that allow a number of components to be connected up and 'talk' to each other. The concept isn't exactly new – there has been plenty of online discussion over several years about the effect certain switches can have on the sound of a network audio switch, and several modified or ground-up designs have been available for some time – but now it seems to be going mainstream (or at least as mainstream as high-end audio can ever be).

The past few months have seen the arrival on the market of at least three new models, ranging in price from £449 to almost £2000 – and yes, this is for a device that appears at first glance to do no more than could be achieved with a £20-£30 box from the likes of Netgear or TPLink, and indeed for even less if you don't mind buying an unknown brand.

First to break cover was the £1999 N100 from Japanese company Melco – already well known for its range of Digital Music Library servers – using the same kind of isolation techniques already seen in those earlier products. Hot on its heels came the offering from The Chord Company, hitherto best known for its range of cables: at the Bristol Show back in February it revealed not only a new brand, having acquired the famous old English Electric name it found languishing in disuse, but the first product to bear it, the £449 8switch. Almost simultaneously accessories specialist Russ Andrews announced its two-box (switch and separate power supply) offering, also with eight ports: the RANS-1, wired with Kimber Kable, which sells for £989.

What are the claimed advantages? Well, there's much talk about improved isolation of noise on the network connections – that's superfluous electrical interference, not noise in the digital music signal itself – and better timing of the stream of data being passed through. None of which came as much of a surprise: as regular readers will recall, some time ago I switched over to optical fibre between my NAS storage/internet connection and network player, and have tried some of the 'tweaks' suggested for standard 'IT-type' network switches, including damping their casework and experimenting with different power supplies.

However, what works best sees the various manufacturers divided. For example, Melco supplies a linear power supply, with an uprated version available as an upgrade, while both English Electric and Russ Andrews use switch-mode supplies; and while Melco has fibre connectivity for those who prefer it, the other two stick to standard copper-cable Ethernet throughout.

So do they work? Well, so far my experience is limited, having spent a while with both the Melco and English Electric but not the Russ Andrews; but I can report that each of the switches I have tried – the three above, a standard Netgear and my heavily modified Ciscos – imparts a different sound to at least some of the network players with which I have tried them. So the intrigue begins – and I have the feeling this one will run and run. **G**

NOTES & LETTERS

Write to us at Gramophone, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com

Barbirolli recollections ...

The article on 'Glorious John' brought vividly to mind a concert which I was fortunate enough to attend when the Hallé under his leadership played in Lincoln Cathedral in the mid-1960s. Despite his obvious physical frailty and the more than occasional tittle from a hip flask in the transept he had the orchestra totally under his spell. I have no recollection at all of the music played but I have never forgotten the electric vibe – and the profound frustration that audience applause was forbidden, not out of respect for the sacred nature of the venue but for fear that it might be the cause of falling loose masonry.

In common with other students I was sat behind the band (in fact behind the timpani!). The disadvantages were I remember outweighed by the ability to view the conductor, face on.

One of the outcomes of student poverty was the resolve (having also climbed many steps into various 'gods', including not least the Palace Manchester) that once earning I would only attend live performances where I could afford a decent seat. Other than that I would buy a decent recording and enjoy the music at home. Fortunately I have been able to benefit from both.

I am now at an age beyond that of Barbirolli at his death. Discs have become increasingly important to me and, within that, this magazine has not been insignificant in introducing me to some of the exciting new music available. Thank you.

Stuart Edwards
Morecambe, Lancs

... and reminiscences

My copy of *Gramophone* arrived on Tuesday; on Friday the postman delivered the boxed set of Barbirolli's Warner recordings. As a teenager in Manchester I was privileged to attend several of Barbirolli's last concerts with the Hallé in the old Free Trade Hall. Like Bernstein or Markevitch, Barbirolli could make recordings which were exciting events, lavishing care on less than first-rate music and breathing life into the familiar with wit, warmth and humanity. I remember seeing him make his way through the orchestra, seemingly small and frail, only to unleash torrents of glorious sound in Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony,

Letter of the Month

Arthur Sullivan, the broadcasting pioneer

Reading the July issue, my eye was caught by Edward Seckerson's 'From where I sit' (page 13). He says that 'As early as 1881, live performances from Paris's two opera houses were relayed to a specially created stand at the Great Electrical Exhibition'. He also makes the comment: 'It's amazing how little known any of this is.' How very true that is, so I thought I would send some information about how in Britain we had reached that point in 1880!

The first performance of Sullivan's sacred cantata *The Martyr of Antioch* was at Leeds Festival on October 15 of that year. Sullivan was appointed as the Festival's new conductor, a post he held for the next 20 years. Dr Anne Stayon regards this performance as the first 'outside broadcast' because the work was relayed via the telephone so that London critics could listen in. And they did! Sullivan led the way in significant developments in British music.

To celebrate his 41st birthday in 1883 he arranged, as Arthur Jacobs writes in *A Victorian Musician*, 'that multiple telephone apparatus should be installed at his home to enable his dinner guests to hear selections from *Iolanthe* at the Savoy Theatre, where the company had been specially engaged by him for the occasion. For business purposes both Sullivan and Gilbert now had



Sullivan's 1880 event was the first 'outside broadcast'

their own direct telephone lines to the Savoy.' And at another dinner party on October 5, 1888, Sullivan became the first celebrated composer to speak at the birth of the gramophone and his song 'The Lost Chord' was among the very first music to be recorded in such a way!

With Beethoven year upon us, you might also consider that Sullivan was the first British conductor to perform the Ninth in 'complete' form, not allowing a stop for coffee before the last movement as was the usual practice. (The symphony was also on the Leeds programme when *The Martyr* was premiered.)

Martin Yates, Sir Arthur Sullivan Society
by email

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Elgar's *Alassio* or the final scene from *Götterdämmerung*. Thanks to the BBC and Barbirolli Society, some of these live performances are available (try *Das Lied von der Erde*, minus the opening bars but with Richard Lewis and Kathleen Ferrier). I'm now awaiting the Barbirolli's RCA box.
Mike Sammons
Somerset

Editorial note

On page 19 of the July edition, the caption for the right-hand photograph in the Barbirolli feature was incorrect. It should have read: Left to right, seated: Janet Baker, Christopher Bishop (producer) and Sir John Barbirolli; and standing, far right: Christopher Parker (balance engineer). The date was August 1967.

OBITUARIES

MADY MESPLÉ

Soprano

Born March 7, 1931

Died May 30, 2020



The French coloratura soprano has died at the age of 89. Born in Toulouse, where she studied, Mesplé moved to Paris to work with the soprano Janine

Micheau. Her debut in 1953 was as Delibes's Lakmé, a role she would sing about 145 times during her career, and which she would record in 1969 for EMI opposite Charles Burles and Roger Soyer under the baton of Alain Lombard. *Lakmé* would also be the opera for her debut in Brussels in 1954 and at the Opéra Comique in 1956. The role would make her part of a French tradition that included singers like Nelly Mathot, Denise Dupleix, Françoise Louvay, Denise Boursin and, of course, Mado Robin. On the death of Robin in 1960, Mesplé became Lakmé's supreme, living interpreter.

With her light, tightly focused soprano and her technical agility she specialised in French coloratura parts including Olympia (*Les contes d'Hoffmann*), Philline (*Mignon*), Leila (*Les pêcheurs de perles*) and Ophélie (*Hamlet*).

In 1960 she stood in for Joan Sutherland as Lucia at the Palais Garnier; other Italian roles would include Amina (*La sonnambula*), Rosina (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Norina (*Don Pasquale*) and Gilda (*Rigoletto*). She sang little in German but did shine as the Queen of the Night (*Die Zauberflöte*) and in two Richard Strauss parts – Zerbinetta in *Ariadne aux Naxos* and Sophie in *Der Rosenkavalier*. She was also much prized in operetta.

Later, she sang modern music by Charles Chaynes, Betsy Jolas, Gian Carlo Menotti, Hans Werner Henze and Arnold Schoenberg (she was selected by Pierre Boulez for performances of *Jakobsleiter*).

She retired from the stage in 1985 and took up teaching in Paris and Lyon.

Her extensive recorded catalogue included numerous French operas and operettas, as well as albums of mélodies: she was one of the singers chosen for EMI's now-classic set of Ravel's complete songs. Reviewing a Poulenc song collection in *Gramophone*'s March 1987 edition, Lionel Salter wrote:

'Mady Mesplé's light, bright voice may be somewhat limited in variety of timbre, but her subtlety of shading, exemplary enunciation and responsiveness to verbal nuances, flexibility and purity of intonation are outstanding.'

JOHN GOLDSMITH

Founder of Unicorn Records

Born February 15, 1939.

Died June 16, 2020



John Goldsmith, who has died aged 81, founded Unicorn, one of the UK's most visionary independent labels. Born in London, he was educated in East

Sheen where he first developed an interest in classical music – a Vienna Philharmonic concert at the Royal Albert Hall, conducted by Rafael Kubelík proved a revelation to the 13-year-old. Leaving school at 15, he went to work for George Wimpey, the building company, and then joined the City of London Police, but music beckoned and in 1964 he got a job working in a record shop on London's King's Road.

A member of the LSO Club, Goldsmith met Pat Plant, who worked in a record shop in Cheapside, and together, each following a dream, they opened The Record Hunter on York Road in Waterloo which not only stocked all the latest UK releases, but prided itself on its imports, including the Soviet Melodiya label. As the shop was very near the Royal Festival Hall, it often opened after concerts and sold recordings by artists who'd just finished performing. (Among its staff was Harold Moores who would later found his own shop in Soho.)

From running a successful shop, Goldsmith and Plant set their sights on a record label and having tracked down a handful of Furtwängler tapes, they launched Unicorn. Plant continued to run The Record Hunter while Goldsmith focused on Unicorn which, thanks to the huge appetite for Furtwängler recordings in Japan, started to thrive. Then tipped off that the conductor Jascha Horenstein was coming to the UK to film Nielsen's Fifth Symphony for the BBC, and that he had no recording contract, Goldsmith organised a meeting through the impresario Sandor Gorlinsky. This prompted a recording association that

NEXT MONTH
SEPTEMBER 2019



Callow meets Rattle

Actor Simon Callow talks to Sir Simon Rattle about Janáček, and what their different art forms can learn from one another

Skelton on Grimes

Mark Pullinger meets the Australian tenor to discuss his definitive interpretation of Britten's eponymous operatic hero, which he has now recorded

Cupertinos catch-up

Edward Breen gets to the heart of the *Gramophone* Award-winners' passion for Portuguese polyphony

Lyric Symphony

Richard Whitehouse compares the available recordings of Zemlinsky's signature work

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launched with *Saga-ström* (released as RHS300, the initials standing for Record Hunter Stereo). There followed Mahler's First and then the Third with the LSO (the subject of a recent 'Classic Reconsidered' feature and subsequent correspondence). Further Horenstein projects included the Nielsen symphonies and opera, *Saul and David*, a Brahms Second with the Danish RSO and orchestral music by Andrzej Panufnik.

As Unicorn's reputation grew, recordings were made with artists of the stature of Leopold Stokowski, Paul Tortelier, Ruggiero Ricci, Reginald Goodall and, for a four-year period until his death, Bernard Herrmann.

Nigel Brandt joined Unicorn as a partner and together he and Goldsmith ran it for four years before Brandt took over the label (when it became Unicorn-Kanchana). In 1988 Goldsmith founded Land of the Lakes tours taking visitors to the UK to the Lake District and other regions in Europe. He emigrated to Schenectady, New York State, in 2006.

JANE PARKER-SMITH

Organist

Born May 20, 1950

Died June 24, 2020



Once described in the *Sunday Times* as 'the Martha Argerich of the organ', Jane Parker-Smith brought a splash of pizzazz to the traditionally rather

staid world of the organ. (A passionate follower of Formula 1 racing, Parker-Smith would later drive a Lotus Esprit, while her backless dresses would cut quite a dash at her recitals.) After study at the Royal College of Music (where she won the Walford Davies prize), and with Nicolas Kynaston and Jean Langlais, Parker-Smith made her London debut at Westminster Cathedral, aged 20, and her Proms debut two years later. Her first recording came out on the Music for Pleasure label when she was 23 – a collection of popular organ works recorded in Westminster Cathedral; 'It is clear that her technique is soundly based and that she has gained a good deal in maturity under the guidance of Nicolas Kynaston,' wrote *Gramophone* in August 1973). In 1975 she made her debut at the Royal Festival Hall, standing in for Fernando Germani.

Though her career focused on concert work she had a long relationship with St James Church, Holland Park, and

Christuskirche on Montpelier Place, Knightsbridge (the most significant German church in London).

She recorded extensively, including Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* with Simon Rattle (EMI), an album of music for trumpet and organ with Maurice André (EMI) and recordings for L'Oiseau-Lyre, ASV and CRD. She also contributed to RCA's complete Widor symphonies series.

ANTON KONTRA

Violinist

Born March 29, 1932

Died May 8, 2020



Born in Budapest, where he was educated at the Liszt Academy, Kontra emigrated to Denmark in 1965. He won prizes at the Bach Competition in

Leipzig and the Wienawski competition in Warsaw. After a period as concertmaster of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (1965-88), he returned to Scandinavia and took up the same role with the Malmö SO. As a soloist, Kontra performed concertos by a number of Scandinavian composers including Per Nørgård, whose Violin Concerto No 1, *Helle Nacht*, he recorded for DaCapo.

In 1973, he formed a string quartet with members of the NZSO, Boris Samsing, Peter Fabricius and Morten Zeuthen. The Kontra Quartet made many recordings, adding a large number of Scandinavian works to the catalogues of companies including BIS and Dacapo.

DAVID BOWERMAN

Founder of Champs Hill Records

Born January 9, 1936

Died June 25, 2020



After a career in farming, David Bowerman – always a passionate music lover and a devoted philanthropist of artists – moved to the family home of

Champs Hill at Coldwaltham in West Sussex, and in 1987 built a 160-seat concert hall, The Music Room, where he hosted recitals. By 2010 he was using it as a recording venue to give an opportunity to numerous young artists, many of whom would go on to enjoy major careers. Artists such Federico Colli, Ksenija Sidorova, Ivana Gavrić, Laura van der Heijden, Ilker Arcayürek, Timothy

Ridout, Kathryn Rudge, Ruby Hughes, Sophie Bevan, Tamsin Waley-Cohen, Kitty Whately, Benjamin Appl and many others made early appearances on the label alongside more established artists like Dame Felicity Lott, Sir Thomas Allen, Emma Johnson and Amanda Roocroft. Such was the impact of the Champs Hill label that it was given the Chamber Music and Song Award by the Royal Philharmonic Society in 2014. In addition, Champs Hill recordings notched up many *Gramophone* Editor's Choice accolades down the years

A self-taught composer, Bowerman released a couple of albums of his own music with many of the artists who had recorded for him. Malcolm MacDonald described his Cello Sonata as 'shapely, concise, vigorous, lyrical, witty, it says what it has to say and no more, with not a wasted note, but lingers long in the memory'.

Bowerman was High Sheriff of West Sussex (1989-90), was made a Deputy Lieutenant and was awarded a CBE in 2004 for his services to the county.

ALLAN EVANS

Record producer

Born April 4, 1956

Died June 6, 2020

Allan Evans, musicologist, record producer, guru of historical pianists and recordings, and founder of Arbiter of Cultural Traditions – a non-commercial organisation – has died at the age of 64. A modest and unassuming man, Evans was a consummate researcher and communicator, known for his passion for historic piano recordings, many of which he brought to a wider public through his Arbiter label. His advocacy of the Polish pianist Ignaz Friedman resulted in a renewed interest in and preservation of his recordings, chiefly on Danacord, Pearl and Naxos, and ultimately in a superb biography. He also co-edited a book on Moriz Rosenthal.

Allan's 30-year pursuit of Friedman in 40 countries is an example of his pioneering work as a music archaeologist. Beyond pursuing one's personal taste or adding to one's collection, his work was an effort to reconstruct lost lineages. Friedman's traces led to his pupil Ignace Tiegerman, who lived in Cairo. Prince Hassan Aziz Hassan, Tiegerman's pupil and close friend, credited Allan for saving Tiegerman from being completely forgotten.

Allan taught for many years at the Mannes School of Music in New York. For years he had been in declining health but he worked on various projects to the end, and his rich legacy lives on.

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














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




























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Gillian Moore

Southbank Centre's Director of Music on still being overwhelmed by Beethoven's originality

From childhood I vividly, viscerally, remember my first encounter with a number of his pieces – where and when and how they made me feel – because I think that's what Beethoven does to people. It was always a case of 'I didn't know music could do that'. And the thing with Beethoven is that even as a child you hear the humanity of it, the struggle and the openness of it. The journey from darkness into life. And the heroic nature of it. He made sense of his experience and of all our experiences. He wasn't a servant to anyone; he represented all of us.

I grew up in a house in an ex-mining town in Lanarkshire and when I was about 10 there was a record in the charts by Waldo de los Ríos of Mozart 40 with a back beat. It was actually terrible, but I was intrigued and wanted to know what the original Mozart symphony was like. So, I went to the library and got a recording out and fell in love with it. But the B side, as it were, was Beethoven's Fifth. I put the needle down and of course I knew the motif. At the time, the war was still relatively recent history and my parents often talked about it. And there was this Morse Code theme that you'd hear on programmes about the war. It was 'Oh, my goodness, it's that!' From then on, I played it over and over. I loved the *Andante*, the way it subdivides and then the subdivisions increase – it taught me so much about rhythm. Then the creepy scherzo and that most incredible moment of all: the swirly passage of cosmic mystery that leads from the scherzo into the blaze of the finale. I'll never forget it.

Another memory comes from a couple of years later, by which time I could play the piano much better. My parents were going away for the day and left me to be looked after by the minister in the manse. And he had a lovely grand piano, a record collection and some scores. He obviously didn't know what to do with a 12-year-old girl at all, but he knew I liked music and so he just sat me down in the living room and said: 'Here's a record of these Beethoven piano sonatas, here are the scores and there's the piano.' And I spent a day listening to the *Moonlight*, *Appassionata* and *Pathétique* Sonatas. It was another visceral experience, coming across this music and being able to feel it under my fingers – miraculous!

My dad was a church choir singer and he joined the Scottish National Orchestra Chorus – they were desperate for tenors so they overlooked the fact that he couldn't read music, and I had to teach him all the music he needed to sing. And so, at 12 or 13, I was bashing through the tenor parts of these great choral works. The first thing he did was Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Alexander Gibson and I remember teaching him his part and getting to know this incredible music. I can't recall why but I went to the rehearsals at the Usher Hall in Edinburgh (they did the first performance there on a Friday and then they'd do the Saturday night in Glasgow). And,




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Quartetto Italiano Philips/Decca

'I got to know these pieces played by the Fitzwilliam Quartet who were in residence when I was at York University. This is not public music, it's private music.'

again, I recall being knocked sideways by it. It was thrilling hearing the orchestra playing that music.

And the magic still works. When I hear Beethoven's Fifth I still can't believe how a human being could have written it. The last concert that happened in the Festival Hall, pre-lockdown, was Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Philharmonia's 'Beethoven Marathon' on March 15. Even then it felt very, very charged. It recreated the concert from the Theater an der Wien in 1808 [which included Symphonies Nos 5 and 6, the Fourth Piano Concerto, *Ah! perfido*, parts of the Mass in C and the *Choral Fantasy*]. Pierre-Laurent Aimard was playing, Stephen Fry presented it and the hall was probably half full because people were nervous about visiting, though technically it was sold out. People were social-distancing before we even knew what that meant. It was one of those occasions that anyone who came won't forget. There were lots of tears because, yes, there was the humanity of the music but what moved me particularly after the Fifth Symphony was the thought – and I said this to Esa-Pekka afterwards – that I wished Beethoven could have heard it played like that because it was phenomenal. And Esa-Pekka smiled and said, 'He heard it in his head like that!' 

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Italian pianist Pina Napolitano brings her exceptional intellect and musicality to Beethoven's Piano Sonatas Opp. 110 and 111, works by Elliott Carter, and Jeffrey Mumford's two *Elliott Carter tributes*.



In *Tempo e Tempi*, Pina Napolitano traces connections between Carter and Beethoven, composers whose music exhibits both power and playfulness, combining taut structures with the freedom of fantasia. *Tempo e Tempi* (Time and Times) takes its name from a poem by Eugenio Montale, set by Carter, that encapsulates two central aspects of the album: the relationships between different superimposed musical times, and the relationship between historical times, which makes possible the musical 'meeting' between these two composers from different epochs. Napolitano plays Carter's *Night Fantasies* and *Two Thoughts about the Piano* alongside Beethoven's Sonatas Opp. 110 and 111, as well as Jeffrey Mumford's two *Elliott Carter tributes*.

"... magical ..." Gramophone

"... up there with Gilels ..." International Piano Magazine

A sumptuous album starring soprano Chen Reiss, pianist Javier Negrín, conductor Thomas Rösner, tenor Jan Petryka, baritone Paul Armin Edelmann, and the Beethoven Philharmonie.



The album title, *Voices*, alludes to the glorious vocal works featured on the album, and to the singing quality of Beethoven's melodic lines in the Piano Concerto arrangement of his Violin Concerto, which ends the album. *Voices* opens with Beethoven's terzetto, *Tremate, empi, tremate*, featuring all three singers accompanied by the Beethoven Philharmonie. At the heart of the disc is Mozart's concert aria for soprano, piano and orchestra, *Ch'io mi scordi di te?*, K. 505. Chen Reiss is a rising star of the opera world, and is paired in the Mozart with Negrín, who has enjoyed considerable acclaim for his solo Odradek releases:

"... played with elegance, beauty and affection ..." BBC Music Magazine;

"... sensitively shaped reading ..." Gramophone



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